



**Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions.**

If you have discovered material in Aston Research Explorer which is unlawful e.g. breaches copyright, (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please read our [Takedown policy](#) and contact the service immediately ([openaccess@aston.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@aston.ac.uk))

# **UNMARRIED YOUNG MOTHERS IN SOUTH- EASTERN NIGERIA: ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES**

**George O. Amakor**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**ASTON UNIVERSITY**

**November 2018**

George Amakor asserts his moral right to be identified as the author of this thesis.

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright belongs to its author and that no quotation from the thesis, and no information derived from it may be published without appropriate permission or acknowledgement.

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

**Aston University**

### **Unmarried Young Mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences**

**George O. Amakor    PhD in Sociology    2018**

In Christian communities such as those found in South-Eastern Nigeria, conservative interpretations of the Bible frown upon any form of premarital sexual activity; unmarried young women are expected to remain virgins until they get married. In such religious communities, biblical injunctions and socio-cultural norms affect how pregnancy and child bearing outside of marriage is understood. Sexual issues are scarcely discussed in the open, except to reiterate messages of abstinence. Despite these warnings and coded messages aimed at regulating sex and discouraging sex related discussions, religious societies are not exempt from the high and increasing rates of premarital sex and pregnancy amongst young people.

This thesis deploys a poststructuralist feminist approach to examine the dominant discourses surrounding the management of unmarried motherhood in Nigeria. It looks at the range of attitudes from family and church members towards early unmarried pregnancy. Using semi-structured, in-depth one-to-one and focus group interviews, this thesis examines the experiences of young unmarried mothers themselves, as well as the actions and attitudes of the church clergy and laity. Drawing inferences from thematically analysed data, this thesis upholds that unmarried young mothers are a highly stigmatised group, with negativity emerging from the family, church and other key social institutions. It also posits that although families and other agents of socialisation fail to provide young women with adequate sex education and contraception, young women, and in some cases their mothers, are the ones primarily blamed and punished for premarital pregnancy, even in instances of rape.

**Key words/phrases:** Sex, Contraception, Premarital Pregnancy, Religion, Stigma

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I remain sincerely and eternally grateful to my supervisors, Dr Sarah-Jane Page and Dr Pam Lowe both of whom believed in me and what I set out to do from the very first day we met. I could not have done this without your professional guidance, words of encouragement and unalloyed support. I am also grateful to Dr Kristin Aune and Dr Katy Pilcher who agreed to examine my thesis. My sincere gratitude also goes to every participant who took part in this study, particularly young unmarried mothers who shared their personal and difficult experiences with me. Special thanks to all churches, community centres, care homes, government agencies and officials within Owerri, Imo State, South-East Nigeria, who in one way or another contributed to the success of this project.

In a very special way, I want to thank my remarkably patient and cheerful wife Janice for enduring my prolonged absence from family activities, along with several other challenges we encountered in the course of my studies. From the depth of my heart, thank you for taking care of our children, especially in those times when my studies took me away from home. May I also thank my entire family, the Amakors, for their continued support and prayers. I would not have survived this journey without the constant support and prayers of several friends and colleagues. Whilst the names are too many to mention here, I want to thank every one of you for supporting me in all the ways you did; thank you. Above all, I am deeply grateful to God for helping me get through the highs and lows of this journey and bringing me to this point.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	9
Background	9
Purpose of the Study	11
Theoretical Orientation: Feminist Poststructuralism	12
Discourse	13
Poststructuralism and Lived Religion	16
Stigma	18
Pro-Feminist Study	19
Gender Construction	21
Thesis Outline	22
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>	25
Introduction	25
Gendered Attitudes of Society and Religious Dualism	25
Historical Construction of Sexuality and Context of Sex	29
European Constructs	31
Colonial Education	32
Construction of Sex and Negotiation	33
Discourse and Language of Sex	35
Young People and Sexual Activity	35
Sex Education, Contraception and Abortion	36
Sex, Christianity and Young People	38
Construction of Motherhood	40
Construction of Unmarried Pregnancy	42
Stigmatisation Discourse and Construction of Unmarried Teenage Motherhood	44
Chapter Summary	48

<b>Chapter Three: Research Methodology</b>	<b>49</b>
Introduction	49
Research Rationale	49
Epistemological Positioning: Pro-Feminism	50
Methods and Sampling Tools	52
Target Groups, Sample Characteristics and Access	54
Sample Characteristics of Unmarried Young Mothers	55
Sample Characteristics of Church/Community Members	56
Undertaking Fieldwork	58
Data Collection Process and Ethical Considerations	62
Positionality and Reflexivity: Notes of a Male Researcher Interviewing Unmarried Young Women in a Patriarchal Society	64
Why Young Unmarried Mothers Spoke to Me	65
Insider/Outsider Cultural and Geographical Distance (Pro-Feminism)	65
Consent Form and Information Sheet	68
Gatekeepers' Influence	68
Analysis	69
Chapter Summary	72
<b>Chapter Four: Sex, Sex Education, Knowledge, Access and Use of Contraceptives and Abortion Practice among Young Unmarried Women in South-Eastern Nigeria</b>	<b>73</b>
Introduction	73
Sexual Activity among Young Unmarried Women	74
Friendship and Love	74
“Forced Sex” and Rape	77
Hope and Promise of Marriage	80
Poverty	82

Views of Church and Community Members on the Reasons behind Young Women's Sexual Activity	83
Sex Education and Pregnancy Prevention	86
Views of Church/Community Members on Sex Education	91
Knowledge About, Access to and Use of Contraceptives by Young Unmarried Women	96
Abortion Practices	99
Views of Church/Community Members on Pregnancy Prevention and Abortion Practice	100
Chapter Summary	104
<b>Chapter Five: Exploring Family and Church Based Stigmatisation through the Experiences of Young Unmarried Mothers</b>	106
Introduction	106
Shaming and School Based Stigmatisation of Unmarried Pregnancy and Young Mothers	107
Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes of Families towards Unmarried Young Mothers	109
Displacement	110
Lack of Marriage and Forced Marriage	113
Isolation and Physical Abuse	116
Extension of Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes towards the Child of an Unmarried Mother	120
Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes of Churches towards Unmarried Young Mothers	122
Church Suspension, Expulsion and Dissociation of Unmarried Mothers	122
Voluntary Withdrawal from Church Attendance	126
Effect of Stigma on Unmarried Young Mothers	127
Chapter Summary	129
<b>Chapter Six: Attitudes of Churches towards Unmarried Pregnancy and Unmarried Young Mothers in South-East Nigeria</b>	131
Introduction	131
The Catholic Church Clergy and Laity	131

The Anglican Church Clergy and Laity	140
Pentecostal Church Clergy and Laity	145
Attitudes of Churches towards Parents (Mother) of an Unmarried Young Mother	151
Lack of Activism of the Laity on Attitudes of Church	
Leadership towards Unmarried Pregnancy and Unmarried Mothers	155
Chapter Summary	158
<b>Chapter Seven: Conclusion</b>	160
Introduction	160
Studying Unmarried Young Mothers in South Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences	160
Revisiting the Literature on Various Aspects of Premarital Sex, Pregnancy and Motherhood	161
Summary of Key Findings	163
Implications	170
Recommendations for Action	171
Recommendations for Further Studies	171
<b>References</b>	173
<b>Appendices</b>	187

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Appendix A: Table Showing General Profile of Unmarried Mothers	187
Appendix B: Table Showing Profile of Parents of Unmarried Mothers	188
Appendix C: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers Interview Conduct	189
➤ C.1: Table Showing Relationship Status	189
➤ C.2: Table Showing Number of Children	189
➤ C.3: Table Showing Level of Education	190
➤ C.4: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers' Occupation	190
➤ C.5: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers' Level of Income	190
➤ C.6: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers' Church Membership	190



➤ C.7: Table Showing Level of Education of Mothers of Unmarried Mothers	190
➤ C.8: Table Showing Occupation of Mothers of Unmarried Mothers	191
➤ C.9: Table Showing Level of Education of Fathers of Unmarried Mothers	191
➤ C.10: Table Showing Occupation of Fathers of Unmarried Mothers	191
➤ C.11: Church/Community Members' one-to-one Interviews Conducted	191
Appendix D: Church/Community Members' Focus Group Interviews Conducted	192
Appendix E: Participants Information Sheet	193
Appendix F: Participants Consent Form	196
Appendix G: Church/Community Members Interview Guide	197
Appendix H: Unmarried Mothers' Interview Guide	198
Appendix I: Church/Community Members' Biographical Data Sheet	200
Appendix J: Unmarried Mothers' Biographical Data Sheet	201

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

Over the years, unmarried teenage pregnancy has been a contentious issue in several societies, which has led to a significant number of studies on various aspects of it (Amobi and Igwegbe 2004; Asonye 2014; Lowe 2016; Tyler 2008; Ngcobo 2009; Yardley 2009; World Health Organisation 2004). A lot of work has been undertaken in Western societies to explore how unmarried mothers are positioned in Western societies and they have been variously associated with gold digging, benefit scrounging and husband snatching (Tyler 2008; Yardley 2008). However, in Nigeria and other developing societies, there has been less of a focus on unmarried mothers. There has been little or no scrutiny of the attitudes of core social institutions such as the church and family, towards unmarried young mothers in developing societies like Nigeria. In Sub-Saharan Africa of which Nigeria is an integral part, young unmarried mothers are said to be faced with various challenges which include: a lack of access to reproductive health services, poverty, lack of formal education, stigmatisation, and lack of general support for both the unmarried teenage mother and her child (Amobi and Igwebge 2004; Ngcobo 2009; WHO 2004). Stressing the magnitude of the problem, the WHO (2004) noted that the normative picture of adolescent mothers in Sub-Saharan Africa is that of an unhealthy-looking young woman with an unhealthy-looking child, poorly educated, suffering from poverty, with a shattered future, a lack of access to reproductive health services and suffering stigmatisation for having an unintended pregnancy. While the picture painted here by the WHO report (2004) is different from the assumed stereotypes applied to a teen mother in developed nations such as the UK, it is crucial to note that the report captures the scale of the challenges faced by unmarried mothers in many developing societies. Prevailing discourses in places like Nigeria have continued to portray unmarried pregnancy as a symbol of moral degeneracy to the detriment of unmarried young mothers and women in general.

Presently, women in Western nations are better placed to control their fertility, due to the availability of health technologies such as effective contraceptives and IVF, together with laws and policy that support gender equality (Lowe 2016). In developing nations such as Nigeria, the reverse is generally the case. The social meanings attached to adolescent premarital sex and early unmarried pregnancy in Southern Nigeria has made young women more susceptible to stigmatisation (Agunbiade et al. 2009). There is also a concern that societal negative reactions towards young unmarried mothers and punishments meted out to young women who become pregnant outside of marriage are disproportionate when compared with their adult counterparts (Agunbiade et al. 2009). A pregnant young unmarried woman is likely to be less well-educated as she is the one who gets pulled out of school (Smith 2000; Smith 2010).

In South-Eastern Nigeria, where the inhabitants are predominantly Christian, the customs and traditions of the area demonstrate a lack of approval of pregnancy before and outside marriage, thus girls are expected to remain virgins until they get married (Amobi and Igwebge 2004). Statistical data on the prevalence of unmarried teenage pregnancy suggests that this expectation of virginity and abstinence from premarital sex is not generally met; thus, several sanctions and other forms of punishment are meted out to young unmarried mothers (Amobi and Igwegbe 2004). The possibility that they may also face stigmatisation and rejection within their primary social institutions such as their churches and families is a concern. As Aderibigbe et al. (2011) emphasised, although these emotional traumas associated with an unplanned teenage pregnancy and early motherhood can be overwhelming to the individual, society can make it worse by being judgemental. Against this backdrop, it becomes necessary to examine societal attitudes towards unmarried teenage mothers; and the experiences of unmarried young mothers in a developing society such as South-Eastern Nigeria, where there is no comprehensive welfare system. Examining the attitudes and actions of families and churches towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried motherhood is made even more crucial because as Ngcobo (2009) puts it, these agents of socialisation (the church and the family) provide individuals with identity and meaning making. My study is also needed because no concerted research has been conducted on the role of churches in Nigeria in the matter of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood, especially in the South-East where the majority of the population practise Christianity.

Data published by Global Christianity in (2011) puts the population of Christians in Nigeria in 2010 at 80,510 000. With a total population of 158 million in 2010, Christians make up more than 50% of the entire Nigerian population. The study further showed that Nigeria has the largest population of Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa. With the majority of this population found in the southern part of Nigeria, 15% are Protestants, 13.7% are Catholics while 22.1% are from other Pentecostal churches. Within this Nigerian Christian population, more than half are said to attend church regularly (Global Christianity 2011; Zarifis 2002).

Churches in Nigeria are generally associated with philanthropy. With a large population and the lack of an adequate welfare system in many developing societies such as Nigeria, the role of the church as a source of support for its members and non-members becomes even more vital (Ngcobo 2009; Smith 2000; Smith 2010). However, studies have also shown that many Christian communities in Nigeria strongly frown upon certain behaviours, particularly those that relate to sex and sexuality (Ojo 2005; Smith 2010). Individuals are said to revere their church community; thus, the individual hardly holds a divergent view from that of the church. The church becomes a moral authority, one which its members are encouraged to follow. Okonofua et al. (2009) held that to a large extent, government officials refuse to publicly share viewpoints that are contrary to that of their church on matters relating to sex.

While churches in Africa are known for blessing virginity and heterosexual marriages, they are also known for frowning upon premarital sex and other behaviours they perceive as contrary to biblical injunctions (Ngcobo 2009; Ojo 2005; Smith 2010). As the most primary agent of socialisation, the family is said to help churches in driving home their message of abstinence and virginity (Okonofua et al. 2009). To this effect, examining the position of the family and the church (laity and clergy) as fundamental social institutions, and the impact their attitudes have on young women's sexuality (with regards to premarital sex and unmarried pregnancy) is necessary.

This introductory chapter provides a blueprint of what this study sets out to do, as well as why, where, when and how it was done. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section commences with setting the background to the study. The second section looks at the purpose of the study, thereby laying out the research objectives and research questions. The third section looks at the theoretical approaches that underpin this research project and introduces this study as a poststructuralist, pro-feminist study which looks at how unmarried pregnancy is socially constructed through discourses. It also opens a conversation about the relationship between poststructuralism and lived religion as well as the construction of gender and stigma. It draws attention to my position as a male researcher conducting a study on unmarried young mothers in a patriarchal society. Finally, the last section of this chapter looks at the overall outline of the thesis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general aim of this study is to investigate the range of attitudes of family and church members towards early unmarried pregnancy as well as the experiences of young unmarried mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria. From the general aim, the specific objectives are:

- ✓ To explore experiences of young mothers and prevailing attitudes towards unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood.
- ✓ To investigate whether family and church-based stigmatisation exists and, if so, its effects on young unmarried mothers.
- ✓ To examine the nature of sex education given to young women in South-Eastern Nigeria.
- ✓ To examine unmarried young mothers' knowledge about, access to and use of contraceptives and abortion practice.

Following the above stated research objectives, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the experiences of young mothers and prevailing attitudes towards unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood?

RQ2: What are the effects of family and church-based stigmatisation of unmarried pregnancy on young unmarried mothers?

RQ3: What is the nature of unmarried young mothers' knowledge of, access to and use of contraceptives as well as abortion practice?

RQ4: What is the nature of sex education given to young women in South-Eastern Nigeria?

The focus of this study is to provide answers to these research questions within the approved ethical standards of both the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Orientation: *Feminist Poststructuralism***

Stating the theoretical perspectives of this study from the start will help in highlighting my epistemological stance and also in providing direction for the entire research process. This study is to be conducted in line with specific theoretical perspectives which, following Johnson (2000, p. 324) are viewed here as “a set of assumptions about reality that underlines the questions we ask and the kind of answers we arrive at as a result”. This thesis revolves around poststructuralist feminist perspectives. A fundamental reason for adopting this theoretical orientation is that feminist poststructuralist research is focused on the prospect of moving beyond what is already known and understood (Gannon and Davies 2005). The task of poststructuralist feminist research as stressed by Gannon and Davies (2005) is not to document basic differences between those categorised as men and those categorised as women; the task is to multiply possibilities, to deliver ways of thinking about ‘male’ and ‘female’ and to engage with the possibility of subjectivities to understand power as discursively constructed and spatially and materially located. To put it simply, feminist poststructuralism is central to this study because of what Gannon and Davies (2005) recorded as the ability of feminist poststructuralism to trouble the binary categories of male/female, sacred/profane, good/bad, thereby making visible the constitutive force of linguistic practices, and dismantling their seeming unavailability.

My alignment with the poststructuralist school of thought is also based on its belief that “words point not to some concrete external reality but merely to other words that we use to construct social reality” (Johnson 2000, p. 315). Poststructuralism is viewed throughout this thesis in line with Butler’s notion of the rejection of “the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural

oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification” (Butler 1999, p. 40; Harcourt 2007). With poststructuralism and feminism in mind, my theoretical orientation differs from a simple social constructivism which, according to Kukla (2000) largely focuses on the significance of culture and the construction of reality through human activity. In fact, the adoption of poststructuralist feminism emphasises that I disagree with theoretical frameworks in which gender and sexuality are understood as inevitable, and as determined through structures of language, social structure and cognition (Gannon and Davies 2005). Poststructuralists argue that since people are the ones who invent and use words, people are actively engaged in creating the social reality, in which they live, rather than being merely limited and controlled by an external, underlying reality (Johnson 2000). This emphasis on how people actively engage in creating and constructing social reality forms the major premise for adopting discourse into the theoretical framework of this study. Consequently, my theoretical positioning draws attention to gendered and socially constructed inequalities and their consequences, especially in developing patriarchal societies. This position will be explored further in this chapter as well as in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### *Discourse*

Foucault examined discourse in terms of how power relations, language and knowledge are used to refer to and understand the ways of talking or thinking about particular subjects that are united by common assumptions (Foucault 1976; Wetherell et al.2007). Citing the transformation of sex into a discourse in Christian communities as a key example, Foucault stressed that “the Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech” (Foucault 1976, p. 21). He also argued that “the forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censorings of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful” Foucault 1976, p. 21). As well as possessing the power to hold the normative order in place, discourse (discursive practices), also has the power to open up the not-yet-known (Foucault 1976; Gannon and Davies 2005). In general, discourse “refers to all that can be thought, written, or said about a particular thing such as a product (like a car, or a washing detergent), or a topic or specialist area of knowledge such as sports or medicine” (Layder 1994, p. 97). Similarly, Smart (2002) saw discourse simply as a group of statements identified as belonging to a single discursive formation. A Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective that includes discourse in terms of power relation, language, identity and knowledge is considered here as essential in researching unmarried pregnancy and motherhood in South-Eastern Nigeria.

With regards to identities, poststructuralist feminism disagrees with the notion of universal identities, even while looking at the contingent and discursive nature of virtually all identities (Gannon and

Davies 2005). In relation to identity as a product of discourse, Burr (1995, p. 53), held that “for each of us, a multitude of discourses are constantly at work constructing and producing our identity. Our identity therefore originates not from inside the person, but from the social realm, where people swim in a sea of language and other signs, a sea that is invisible to us because it is the very medium of our existence as social beings”. Following Burr’s suppositions, this study looks further at why and how certain versions or ways of representing things enjoy widespread popularity and acceptance while some others do not. In the case of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood in South-East Nigeria, this study looks at societal and individual representations of a young woman’s sexual life; the reasons behind this representation and how it is sustained.

With regard to power and how it is exercised as a product of discourse, Foucault (1976) argues that power should be viewed more as an effect of discourse. The vital place power occupies in this study is rooted in Foucault’s (1976) view of power, as not merely some form of possession which some people have and others do not, but as a tool that ensures the exemption of few elites from several complex prescriptions while subjugating the decisions of those in no position of authority. As Burr (1995, p. 64) noted, “to define the world or a person in a way that allows you to do the things you want is to exercise power”. She maintained that “we can exercise power by drawing upon discourses which allow our actions to be represented in an acceptable light”. Therefore, one of the key tasks of this study is to explore how power, identity, language and other discourses evolve in the relationship between a young unmarried woman and her heterosexual partner, her family and her church. Unlike Foucault, in this study I will link power to gender inequality and the disempowerment of women in the Nigerian society. As will be defined later in this chapter, gender in this thesis is viewed in line with Butler (1999) as socially/culturally constructed.

Within the theoretical domain of this study, there is a need to look at the role played by power in the discourse of unmarried teenage pregnancy and early motherhood. It is necessary to look at power in terms of how it is constructed and operated using institutional techniques and tools (Smart 2002; Wetherell et al. 2007). These power tools used for control and (in some cases) punishment, include both linguistic and non-linguistic discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical propositions, morality and even philanthropy (Smart 2002; Wetherell et al. 2007). In most cases, the effect of power on the issue of young people’s sexuality is seen within families (Foucault 1976; Gordon 1980). This overbearing place of power on sexuality, which is mostly to the detriment of young women, is linked to society’s pursuance of its notion of heteronormativity (Butler 1999). Society is said to use the medium of families to initiate a system of control over young people’s sexuality (Foucault 1976; Gordon 1980). Power relations have played a huge role in the emergence of an era that restricted matters of sex and

sexuality to “the parents’ bedroom” (Foucault 1976, p. 3). Outside this confinement which would involve heterosexual adult couples, discussions about sex are to remain vague with proper demeanour, verbal decency and the avoidance of body contact (Foucault 1976). To this end, Foucault (1976) stressed that if repression remains the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality, freedom from this repression may not be achieved, except at a considerable cost.

The basis of social constructionism in relation to any societal issue is that it is a sociological theory of knowledge that examines how cultural and social responses develop in social context (Fonda et al. 2013). Discourses are socially constructed on the premise that different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Levy 2006). The construction of sexuality and the context of sex are largely discussed here on this basis. I agree with Weeks (2010) that sexuality should not simply be viewed as a primordially natural phenomenon, but should be viewed strongly as a product of social and historical forces.

I discuss sexuality here on the premise that our knowledge of the world and our currently accepted ways of understanding the world are products of the social processes constructed through daily interactions between people in the course of social life, hence what is regarded as truth varies historically and cross-culturally (Burr 1995). A critical cause for concern in these daily interactions between people wherein sexuality is framed is that the interaction is dominated by a gendered patriarchal society (Butler 1999). Such male dominated interactions on sexual issues are geared towards the control of the body of women of all age brackets, thereby denying them sexual freedom, satisfaction and agency. Bearing this in mind, just like Egan (2013), my focus is not simply on the sexual behaviour of young people, but more on the ways in which adults, especially patriarchal institutions have constructed sexuality as a social problem.

Foucault’s early exploration of the relationship between power and sexuality, and other discourses was in a cultural setting that is very different from that of the people of South-Eastern Nigeria. In fact, Ako-Nai (2013) also expressed concerns about the adoption and application of Western theories, particularly feminist theories in Africa. She argued that “Even in African societies, for example Nigeria, the aspirations and desires of women differ. The differences are based on religion, ethnic and religious values among others” (Ako-Nai 2013, p. 3). In addressing this critique, I argue that scholars of African origin (Including Ako-Nai) also use Western theories to make sense of socio-cultural and religious issues emanating from African societies. The adoption of Western theories should not only be reserved for the explanation of societal issues in Africa; it should also be used to contend socio-cultural and religious practices that are inimical to vulnerable groups and individuals. In any case, the defining



factor, (one to which even Ako-Nai alludes) is that women in Nigeria and in Africa more widely are facing unprecedented inequality on the basis of gender. Consequently, Nigerian based studies such as Agunbiade et al. (2009); Cornwall (2002) and Smith (2010) have all hinted that the issue of power and repression apply to the Nigerian context. Today, my adoption of this theoretical approach stems from my conviction that it can be applied in religious, patriarchal, developing societies such as those found in Nigeria. Therefore, this thesis will explore the extent to which discourse as a theoretical perspective is applicable in my chosen research setting as well as the impact of discourse on young people's sexuality.

### *Poststructuralism and Lived Religion*

This thesis will look at the lived religious, sexual and other experiences of young women in relation to societal demands for femininity and chastity. In doing so, I take into account that lived religion is not a poststructuralist account of life, particularly because poststructuralists are concerned with the text (Gannon and Davies 2005; Harcourt 2007). In the words of Gannon and Davies (2005, p. 312), "poststructuralist analysis begins, then, with the discursive and regulatory practices in the texts of science, of literature, of philosophy and of everyday life". Questions have also been raised about the substantive content of poststructuralism, especially its ability to tackle the problems of social structures and institutions, as well as its conceptions of subjectivity, agency, power, identity, and domination (Howarth 2013). Thus in developing a link between lived religion and poststructuralism, I take on-board these critiques of poststructuralism, particularly those that have questioned its practicability and those who suggest that it is embedded in the texts (Howarth 2013; Harcourt 2007). In this thesis therefore, I pay attention to the discourses that are generated through the lived experiences of unmarried young mothers (McGuire 2011). I draw attention to how these discourses are generated at a lived level and the reasons why individuals do what they do in their everyday life. I draw attention to the material effects of circulating discourses, especially on young unmarried mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria.

In line with Aune (2014); Hall (1997) and McGuire (2011), I define lived religion in this thesis as religious practices that lay emphasis on the importance of daily experiences of individuals. The term lived religion is useful for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices (McGuire 2011). Therefore, this concept of religion (lived religion) as McGuire (2011) recorded, is particularly apt for sociological analysis, because it depicts a subjectively grounded and potentially creative place for religious experience and expression. In presenting the findings from her study of feminist Christians, Aune stressed that "the first characteristic of feminist spirituality is that it is *de-churched*" (Aune 2014, p. 129). This is to say that the focus is not on the individual's attachment to a church or religious group but on the individual's personal experiences and spiritual relationships. My focus therefore is on how individuals in different religious groups (churches) and in different social settings confront everyday rituals and religious

events (Orsi 1997). Rather than relying on institutionalised dogmas that are dichotomous, the focus is on how everyday events shape a person's religious and spiritual positioning. As these discursive dichotomies do not account for the entirety of everyday experiences of individual members of religious institutions, appraising the lived experiences of members of religious groups and relating those experiences to the beliefs and practices of their religious institution is vital.

Scholars such as McGuire (2011) have argued that popular religious practices are ambivalent and/or multivalent; which means that they have no single fixed meaning or/and value. McGuire (2011) maintained that these beliefs and practices can be evoked for dissent and liberation, as well as to support the status quo privilege of those in power. In a similar manner, most feminists who participated in Aune's study "felt that institutional religion was implicated in, and even caused, women's subordination" (Aune 2014, p. 139). The individual's religious practices, experiences, and expressions are made up of various complexities such that, oftentimes, our concepts for describing and analysing individual's religions simply fail to capture the multifaceted, diverse, and malleable nature of the beliefs, values, and practices of an individual's own religion (McGuire 2011). This explains why individuals from varied religious backgrounds have a tendency to hold similar socio-cultural and political views and vice versa.

McGuire (2011) further stressed that at the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent, hence people's religious practices and the stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting, and growing. Similarly, Orsi (1997, p. 8) noted that "men and women do not merely inherit religious idioms, nor is religion a fixed dimension of one's being, the permanent attainment of a stable self. People appropriate idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances". The central message of Orsi's argument is that religious ideas and impulses are invented, borrowed and improvised at the intersections of life (Orsi 1997). Harvey (2013) talked about the importance of not defining religions by what authoritative books or historical founders and preachers say people should think or do; rather the area of concentration should be on what people actually do. Further, he stated that this was more than important; it was necessary.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, one key component of poststructuralism is its ability to question discursive binary categories (Gannon and Davies 2005). Thus, as a proponent of poststructuralism, throughout this thesis, I question discursive binaries that perpetuate inequality, such as man versus woman, sacred versus profane and married versus unmarried. I argue that the individual's lived everyday experiences as articulated in McGuire (2011) cannot be ignored. I agree with Page (2010) that the idea that something has to be either one thing or the other is a fundamental problem with a dualism; a problem that cannot be taken lightly.

## *Stigma*

In laying the foundation for a clear understanding of stigma, Goffman (1963, p. 14) noted that “the term stigma and its synonyms conceal a double perspective: does the stigmatised individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them?”. Goffman’s notion of discredited and discreditable plights of a stigmatised individual forms the foundation for the definition of stigma and its major types discussed here. As mentioned earlier, one major objective of this study is to investigate whether young unmarried mothers are stigmatised within their families and churches and the effects of such stigmatisation. Having followed Foucault (1976) to highlight how society regulates sexual choices of individuals through its social institutions by controlling key discourses such as those pertaining to power, language and identity; it is also important to highlight the place occupied by stigma. In the course of exercising its power to regulate the behaviour and choices of individuals (Foucault 1976), society constructs stigma discourses to draw attention to the perils and subservience represented by those believed to be deviating from its acceptable norms (Goffman 1963). Thus, stigma is applied here as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman 1963, p. 13). It is conceptualised as attributes that make the individual possessing them less desirable in our minds, since we have made certain assumptions as to what the individual before us ought to be (Goffman 1963). The individual in possession of such less desirable attributes is therefore viewed as bad, dangerous or weak, “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman 1963, p. 12). In this study, my investigation of cases of stigmatisation of unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers is conceptualised in line with Goffman’s notion of stigma.

Following the foundations laid by Goffman, scholars such as Scambler (2009) and Stuenkel and Wong (2013) have defined felt and enacted stigma. “Felt stigma is the internalised perception of being devalued or not as good as by an individual (Stuenkel and Wong 2013, p. 53). Felt stigma can be related to fears of being labelled by others, even when the stigmatising characteristics are not externally apparent and therefore unknown. Shame, for instance, is a key component of felt stigma (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). Felt stigma is “internalised sense of shame and immobilising anticipation of enacted stigma”. (Scambler 2009, p. 451). With the enormous demands of femininity, virginity and chastity made on young unmarried women in Nigeria, young women who perceive themselves or who suspect they may be perceived as deviants are likely to encounter felt stigma even when there is no physical proof of their deviance. This brings me to enacted stigma which, according to Stuenkel and Wong (2013, p. 53) “refers to the behaviours and perceptions by others towards the individual who is perceived as different”. Enacted stigma is mainly a situation response of others to an individual with visible overt stigmatising attributes (Scambler 2009; Stuenkel and Wong 2013). Since enacted stigma simply means “discrimination by others on grounds of being imperfect” (Scambler 2009, p. 451), my

intention is to investigate the attitudes of churches and families towards their members (young unmarried mothers) who they perceive as carriers of societal attributes of imperfection.

In line with Goffman's notion of stigma, Stuenkel and Wong (2013) examined devaluation, labelling and stereotyping of individuals; and consequently argued that culture and religion facilitate and in fact determine stigma. They argued that devaluing results in enacted stigma as demonstrated by those who categorise individuals as inferior or even dangerous (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). They also saw stereotyping as a social reaction to ambiguous situations which allows us to react to group expectations rather than to the expectation of individuals. Stuenkel and Wong (2013) went further to define labelling as the way society labels behaviours that do not conform to the norm. They argued that the labels attached to an individual's condition influences the way we think about that individual. In this thesis therefore, I will follow these definitions and theories of stigma stated in this section to explore the stigmatisation of young unmarried women, by individuals and social institutions, such as schools and local church communities.

### *Pro-feminist Study*

In terms of definition, I am not aware of the existence of a clear-cut difference between the definitions of a feminist and a pro-feminist. Thus I simply posit that whoever stands unequivocally for gender equality falls within the category of a feminist and or a pro-feminist. Nonetheless, it is vital to state that throughout this study, my consideration of myself as a feminist/pro-feminist has been questioned in some circles, particularly in feminist circles. At conferences, events, seminars and workshops, individuals have questioned why I chose to conduct a study in which I would have to interview young unmarried women about their sexual experiences and pregnancy journeys. Aside from answering such individuals at those events by stating my total commitment and advocacy for gender equality; I have explicitly answered these questions in greater detail in this chapter and in Chapter Three.

Although some scholars such as Holmgren (2011) have argued that it is not unusual that men consider themselves to be feminists, my experience suggests that this view is neither generally shared nor generally accepted. This draws attention to the notion that "men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" Heath (1987, p. 1). Bearing this in mind, I reflect on my feminist/pro-feminist positionality throughout this thesis, particularly on the basis of Heath's concept that "no matter how sincere, sympathetic or whatever, we are always also in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered" (Heath 1987, p.1). Thus, in order not to be drawn into the argument of whether a male researcher could be explicitly considered a feminist, I simply agree with Kaufman and Kimmel (2011) that regardless of whatever any of us think about the label, the ideas of feminism are still relevant not only to women, but

very much to men. Irrespective of the criticisms and negative media stereotypes that makes embracing feminism uneasy for men (Kaufman and Kimmel 2011), I agree with Jardine and Smith (1987) that the recent work of a considerable number of male intellectuals in the humanities is wilfully engaging and deploying feminist thought and feminist theory. In my case, I followed the steps of Lapierre (2007) and consider myself a pro-feminist. Viewing myself as a pro-feminist simply means that I am explicitly pro-gender equality. This conviction is the foundation of this study and it is reinforced in this thesis.

In simple terms, this study was conceived to investigate the actions and attitudes of a highly religious and patriarchal society and its institutions towards vulnerable young and unmarried pregnant women. Studies of this nature are not uncommon; finding a male researcher who is conducting such studies should also not be seen as alien. In terms of my research setting, I am not just an “outsider” male researcher, but one who by birth and upbringing is part of the oppressors’ social group. I was born and raised in the research setting (Imo State, South-East Nigeria), thus as Lapierre (2007) pointed out, I cannot locate myself outside patriarchy. By reflecting on how social privilege is embodied in Nigeria, I argue that my positionality (which is discussed in detail in Chapter Three) is beneficial to this study. Consequently, it is crucial that I make it abundantly clear that I have positioned myself unambiguously against all forms of male domination, throughout this thesis and beyond. As studies of this nature are usually conducted by female feminist researchers, it is difficult to conceive a male conducting such studies ethically, without perceived and anticipated subjugation of his vulnerable female participants.

In the words of Hearn (1992, p. 161), “the relationship of men to feminism(s) is a difficult one: it is fundamentally about power, and is fundamentally problematic”. In response to these concerns, I grew up witnessing the enormous challenges faced by young unmarried women who become pregnant outside of marriage (see Chapter Three for details). For over two decades of my knowledge of these challenges, there have been no significant intervention programs, campaigns or studies in this area from a feminist standpoint. The decision to pursue this study came from an unreserved and total commitment to feminism. As was the case with Lapierre (2007), there was a clear sense from the outset, that this study could only be achieved through a strong commitment to feminism. Most importantly, my focus and desire is to bring societal injustices against young unmarried mothers in Nigeria to light.

For several years, feminism has evolved and birthed variant “waves” and schools of thought, such that formulating and accepting a unitary feminist perspective has remained one key challenge faced by feminism and feminist scholars (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010; Lapierre 2007; Maynard 1995). For instance, Maynard (1995) admitted that there are difficulties involved in the process of establishing distinct categories within second-wave feminism. Proponents of radical feminism have also viewed it as a “woman-centred approach” which stresses the validity and centrality of women's experiences and

rejects a scale of values that makes man the measure and judge of women's worth (Bryson 1999; Lapierre 2007). In a similar manner, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010, p. 55) saw liberal feminism as “the belief that women are suppressed in contemporary society because they suffer unjust discrimination”. In any case, this study identifies with the poststructuralist feminist school thought. More importantly, it simply identifies with the shared notion of feminism, which is equality between the sexes. Following Frye (1983) and Lapierre (2007) I stress that a feminist perspective as my epistemological positioning, is crucial for exploring the experiences of young women in a patriarchal society, as it considers the forces that maintain their subordination. The reasons that informed this commitment are discussed throughout this thesis, especially in Chapter Three.

### *Gender Construction*

In line with Butler's position on the performative conceptualisation of gender (see Butler 1999), Schilt, and Westbrook (2009) explored the theorisation of heteronormativity by opposing the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders that reflects biological sex. Since heterosexuality requires a binary sex system, as it is predicated on the seemingly natural attraction between two types of bodies defined as opposites, heteronormativity maintains inequality between men and women (Schilt, and Westbrook 2009). In relation to its conceptualisation, particularly in patriarchal societies, the concept of heteronormativity will be examined as a higher-order discourse in this thesis. It is however important to reiterate that the focus of this study is on heterosexual relationships. But as Jackson (2006) noted, feminists have a vested interest in what goes on within heterosexual relations because they are concerned with the ways in which heterosexuality depends upon and guarantees gender division.

As a poststructuralist study embedded in feminism, the conceptualisation of gender throughout this thesis follows Butler's (1999) notion of gender performativity. In opposing what she described as the heterosexism at the core of sexual difference fundamentalism, Butler drew from poststructuralism to make her points (Butler 1999). She argued that gender identity is constructed as a form of performance, reiteration and or acting out of what it means to be gendered as male or female (Butler 1999). Butler maintained that in the course of gender performance, people become tied in to socially and culturally constructed ways of what it means to be a normal male or female. In recent years, there has been growing attention to gendered practices and processes, and multiple/composite masculinities and femininities, wherein such insights are sometimes developed within poststructuralist approaches to gender, with emphasis on discourses and subjectivities (Hearn 2015). Exploring feminist views and other accounts of women's and men's position in society, Hearn (2015), highlighted how what was often thought of as natural and biological was also social, historical and political. The implication of this in Nigeria for instance, is the creation of an unbalanced socio-cultural and political divide; a society where women are positioned and treated unfairly when compared to men. Using Nigeria as a case in

point, this thesis upholds that the social, historical and political notion of gender does not encourage equality of the sexes.

Critiques of Butler such as Boucher (2006, p. 1) argued that her “theoretical trajectory exhibits a major inconsistency, which indicates the limitations of an individualistic account of subject formation framed in exclusively cultural terms”. Butler’s analysis is also accused of lacking material reality, because it is embedded in films and texts (Boucher 2006; Harcourt 2007) which are “sometimes dense and difficult” to read (Boucher 2006, p. 3). In my case, I am not reducing my analysis to the text; rather, I am looking at real life experiences of individuals (young unmarried women) who are living under patriarchal hegemonic norms. The examination of gender in this thesis is on the basis that gender roles are connected with an individual’s constructions and performances of roles that are either accepted or rejected by dominant social institutions of society. These institutions, as Foucault (1976) noted, police and discipline those who, by their assessment, do not fit into the approved performances and constructions of the larger society. Therefore, in relation to gender, Butler (1999, p. 8) stressed that “the task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize”. The theoretical orientation of this study in relation to gender is tailored along these lines and this will be discussed further in Chapter Two and in other subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### **Thesis Outline**

Chapter Two will examine literature on discourses relating to the socially constructed context of sex, sexuality, young women’s access to contraceptives and abortion practice. From a feminist perspective, attention will be paid to the place occupied by power, discourse and knowledge in the framing of sex, sexuality and sexualisation of women’s bodies. A review of the extent of stigmatisation of unmarried young mothers and their children in South-East Nigeria and other societies will also be conducted. Christianity and sexuality will also be looked at in terms of gendered stigmatisation along the lines of religious dualism and lived religious experiences, across various socio-cultural and religious settings.

Chapter Three will focus on my methodology by looking at the empirical aspects of this study and highlighting the various research methods and tools used. It will establish the rationale behind this research project, followed by my epistemological positioning. It will also offer justification for the chosen methods of sampling and tools. I will then look at the groups targeted in this study, stating how access was negotiated. Fieldwork processes and the process of data collection will be discussed in this chapter, as well as a review of notes from fieldwork in relation to my positionality and reflexivity. The method of analysis will also be explored.

The three analyses and discussion chapters (chapters Four, Five and Six) will situate this study and the empirical findings within key analytical and theoretical frameworks, especially those highlighted in chapters one and two. Led by the voices of young unmarried mothers, Chapter Four will explore the sexual experiences of young unmarried women. It will look at the general context of the sex and sexuality education of young women in Owerri, Imo State, South-East Nigeria. It will analyse findings on young women's knowledge and access to pregnancy prevention and abortion practice. It will look at some of the reasons behind the declining age of sexual debut of young people, particularly young unmarried women. In line with narratives from participants in this study, this chapter will look at various factors that contribute to unmarried early pregnancy. It will further look at the circumstances around the sexual activities of young women (consensual and non-consensual). Attention will be paid to the quality of sex education provided to young unmarried women by agents of socialisation such as: families, churches and schools. Although voices of unmarried young mothers will lead the discussions in this chapter, attention will be paid to the views and reactions of individual members of churches (laity and clergy) and members of various communities from the research setting. These emerging findings will be analysed in relation to significant socially constructed discourses (such as those pertaining to gendered sexual repression and repressive sex education) which are operational in the study setting. Thus, data on general sexual experiences of unmarried young mothers will be integrated into relevant literature and theoretical discourses mentioned here.

In a similar way to Chapter Four, Chapter Five will explore the experiences of unmarried young mothers in relation to stigma and general prevailing societal attitudes towards early unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. This chapter will use the commentaries of unmarried mothers who participated in this study to highlight stigmatising attitudes of individuals and social institutions such as the family and church (clergy and laity) towards unmarried pregnancy and young unmarried mothers. These findings will be linked to theoretical discourses, mainly those relating to male sexual drive and rape as well as discourses on stigma, especially those that tend to stigmatise unmarried young mothers.

Chapter Six will use narratives from focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews conducted with the clergy and laity of three major church denominations (Pentecostals, Anglicans and Catholics), to explore general attitudes of churches towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It will investigate the similarities and differences in the attitudes of the three Christian denominations towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. It will also highlight how parents (particularly mothers) of unmarried pregnant young women become victims of stigmatisation from their own church, alongside their daughters. This chapter will draw attention to participants' denial of responsibility, blame game, and other contradictions within and between churches regarding who expresses negative attitudes towards unmarried young mothers. Discourses on religious binaries and submission will also be looked



at here. This chapter will argue that these discourses are constructed by powerful social groups, to ensure the enhancement of hegemonic masculinity as well as other forms of socio-cultural and economic inequality.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Seven) will start with a review of the fundamental reasons behind my decision to conduct this study. It will also review the aims this study set out to achieve and the reasons why I decided to set and pursue these aims. It will revisit the literature, thereby stressing the key issues emanating from societal construction of premarital sex, sex education, contraception and abortion as well as unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It will then summarise the key findings from this research and their implications when aligned with contemporary poststructuralist feminist literature, in terms of the place of women in developing patriarchal societies. From my epistemological standpoint, it will also harmonise my argument with finding from this study. It will highlight the contributions of this study to current knowledge before proposing directions for action and further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

In the first chapter of this thesis, attention was drawn to the theoretical underpinnings of this study as a feminist poststructuralist study focused on discourses, and other socially constructed issues around gender, sexuality and Christianity. I laid the foundation for the theoretical positioning of this study by drawing attention to key epistemologies that are relevant to my study, such as those found in Butler (1999), Foucault (1976) and Goffman (1963). The chapter also stated assured problems with unmarried pregnancy and motherhood in general but with specific attention to Nigeria. Bearing these key areas of the previous chapter in mind, this chapter will elaborate on the theoretical positioning I have adopted, and its relevance and applicability to this study. In practical terms, this review of literature is geared towards positioning my study as one that will not only look at unmarried early motherhood from one direction, but one that will look at it from various angles. This will require looking at various perspectives of the definition of motherhood and unmarried teenage motherhood both in developing and developed societies.

From a poststructuralist feminist standpoint, I will start this chapter with looking at the gendered attitude of society and the impact of religious dualism. I will focus on how discourses are socially constructed by looking at literature that relate to the context of sex, sexuality, young women's access to contraceptives and abortion practice. Attention will be paid to the place occupied by power and knowledge in the framing of sex, sexuality and sexualisation of women's bodies. A review of the extent of stigmatisation of unmarried young mothers and their children in Nigeria, particularly in the South-East and other societies, will also be conducted.

#### **Gendered Attitudes of Society and Religious Dualism**

In line with Butler (1999, 2004), gender is conceptualised in this study as socially constructed and maintained by dominant power structures. In the course of maintaining these dominant power structures, gender becomes "the apparatus by which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine take place, along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes" (Butler 2004, p. 42). In patriarchal societies that are largely stratified along binary terms, gender is a tool for domination, used by powerful individuals and dominant social groups. Trends of this nature are not in short supply in religious circles, particularly in Christian communities. The construction of gender in this manner also sets the pace for the birth and resurgence of regulatory discourses, most of which are effected and sustained by social institutions such

as churches. Thus, particular kinds of regulations may be understood as instances of a more general regulatory power, specifically for gender regulation (Butler 2004).

As Butler (1999, p. 42) noted, “to assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the masculine and the feminine is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost”. In line with Butler’s postulations, I argue that definitions of gender that focus on binary opposites in relation to masculinity and femininity facilitate and perpetuate inequality. I also posit that gendered allocation of binary attributes and expectations, especially in religious patriarchal societies such as those found in Nigeria would amount to retention of power and control by dominant social groups and individuals. In any case, although the notions of masculinity and femininity are produced and naturalised through the mechanism of gender, it can also be the apparatus for the deconstruction and denaturalisation of such terms (Butler 1999). Bearing in mind the many challenges the construction of gender poses, I agree with Hearn (2015), that naming the binary is a crucial way to interrogate and deconstruct it. Therefore, this study recognises and pursues the goal and the need for the deconstruction of notions of gender that prolong unfair treatment of the individuals on the basis of sexual differences, especially in African societies where Ako-Nai (2013) noted that women are oppressed.

As hinted in Chapter One, many of the reasons behind the existing discourse on young people’s sexuality, especially young women, are centred on society’s notion of dualism. In both developed and developing societies, religion (in this case Christianity) demands purity from its members, thus members who wander into profanity are made to face the consequence. In relation to married and unmarried pregnancy, married childbearing is associated with the sacred, while unmarried childbearing is associated with the profane. The concept of stigmatisation (penance) within religious circles, especially those found in developing societies emanated on this basis. These boundaries are being policed by social institutions such as the church.

Religion has been and continues to be one of the narratives human beings have authored in order to define, explain and determine existence (Juschka 2001). Consequently, male-dominated religious institutions for several years and in several societies are said to have enjoyed unprecedented power and authority over its laity. Like other religions, from its initiatory society, Christianity has had hierarchical structures as the basis of relations between men and women (Juschka 2001). Having emphasised that religious institutions constantly demand sacredness from their members, it is important to look at the lived experiences of members of these religious institutions especially, in relation to female sexuality and gender relations. While some proponents of lived religion such as McGuire (2011) largely paint a

picture of normal everyday experience of Christians from different communities at different times, some feminist scholars such as Milford (1994) and Page (2010) argue that femininity has for several years been denied a place in the Church, or at least an authorised and sacred-bearing place. This calls for continuous and thorough examination of how women are portrayed within these sacred spaces. In Nigeria, looking at the leadership structures of the three main church denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal), it is evident that women are not given any significant position of authority (Ojo 2005; 2011). This again portends the difficulties women would face in protecting the interests of young unmarried mothers within these faith communities.

Although Durkheim (1912/1995) and Eliade (1957) both conceived of the sacred as separate from the profane, Page (2010) highlighted the gendered repercussions of such classifications for women. The association of women and men with the profane and the sacred respectively (Page 2010) have enshrined patriarchy and the overall disempowerment of women in our religious spaces. To put it simply, popular religious traditions, beliefs and practices have historically supported patriarchal family and community structures of authority (McGuire 2011). Explaining this further, Northup (1997) opined that the profane world women are made to live in is a world that those who live in it (women) are not able to transform, neither are they allowed to be transformed by it.

On the other hand, several examples abound in lived religious experiences of Christian women, underscoring the perpetuation of gendered religious norms under the umbrella of sacredness and profanity; some of these are recorded in Griffith (1997) and McGuire (2011). Griffith (1997) drew attention to how women who participate in Aglow in the United States of America have used prayers to alleviate the conflicts and contradictions that arise within their households. For several Christian women, prayer becomes the turning point which marks the moment when all attempts to assert control over the conditions in one's family life are willingly dissolved in favour of sacrificial obedience (Griffith 1997). Thus, leading women from church organisations are said to explicitly counsel their fellow members to surrender their wills to God and to submit themselves to God's hierarchy of earthly representatives, particularly clergymen and husbands; by incorporating powerful themes both from the broader evangelical culture and from contemporary therapeutic idioms, (Griffith 1997). A close look at some literature from Nigeria such as Izugbara (2004b); Onyeocha (2013); and Ojo (2005; 2011) hints that the issues raised in Griffith (1997) also exist in Nigerian churches. I will attempt to explore this further in this study.

There is significant evidence in the literature (within and outside religious communities) suggesting society's ill-treatment of young unmarried mothers from studies such as Agunbiade et al. (2009) and

Maliki (2012). Women, particularly unmarried young mothers in both developed and developing societies are labelled and stigmatised (Aderibigbe et al. 2011; Agbalajobi 2010; Para-Mallam 2007; Tyler 2008; Wallbank 2001; Yardley 2009). Such gendered stigmatisation is also found within faith communities, especially in churches where young unmarried mothers are given various kinds of punishment, penance and labels (Ngoobo 2009; Smith 2001). The work of Furlong (1988) and recently Page (2010) explicitly held that such labels are constructed for women by patriarchal men who dominate our socio-political and religious environment. McGuire (2011) also stressed that in the course of delineating dualism, popular religious practices can promote both positive and negative social values encouraging the community to practice both cooperation and mutual support on the one hand and animosity and violence on the other. She went further, to say that the same cultural resources can be used for domination, inequality and violence as well as cooperation, harmony and mutual respect. The same traditions can inspire authoritarian oppression, war, and abusive personal relationships as well as liberation, peace, and genuine caring relationships (McGuire 2011). As highlighted in Griffith (1997); Furlong (1988); Page (2010); Howson (2005) and Orsi (1997), these displays of oppression, domination and inequality are mainly directed towards women and other less privileged members of the society who are not in positions of authority. In fact, finding from Aune (2014) held that many feminist Christians felt that religious institutions fail to respect women's experiences.

In general, the communication link between men and women in most instances are also tailored along the lines of good/strong man and bad/weak woman (Juschka 2001). Drawing attention to the gendered communication link between men and women, Juschka (2001), held that the gendered everyday experiences of women are associated with the patterns of language interaction between women and men. According to Juschka (2001), such narratives avoid blaming men for the subjugation of women in everyday conversations, but only see it as some form of "miscommunication". To this end, female – male miscommunication is viewed as an "innocent by-product of different socialisation patterns and different gender cultures, occurring between speakers who are ostensibly social equals" (Juschka 2001, p. 35). Juschka argued that although cultural differences between these groups are undeniable and may lead to miscommunication, hierarchies determine whose version of the communication situation will prevail, whose speech style will be seen as normal; who will be required to learn the communication style and interpret the meaning of the other; whose language style will be seen as inferior, deviant and irrational; and who will be required to imitate the other's style in order to fit into society (Juschka 2001). Consequently, men's conversational dominance parallels their social/political dominance such that men's speech becomes a vehicle for male displays of power (Juschka 2001). Such power, according to Maltz and Borker (1982, p. 198-199), is "a power based in the larger social order but reinforced and expressed in face-to-face interaction with women".

In Nigerian Christian communities, the idea of submissiveness is said to reinforce traditional gender roles and as such remains a constant in religious circles and in families. In these Nigerian societies, gender as a norm can be linked to what Butler (1999) saw as a form of social power, which produces the intelligible field of subjects and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted. As discussed earlier in this chapter, colonial and missionary education enshrined these ideologies into the Nigerian culture such that the post-colonial discourses of gender still hold on to it (Izugbara 2004b). In fact Ako-Nai (2013) argued that the history and experiences of Africans, in this case Nigerians, have influenced their resistance, organisations and struggles, including the feminist struggle. In any case, it is equally important to highlight the cost of the gendered attitude of the church to women in the course of sustaining these dichotomies. Griffith (1997) believed there would be a significant shift over time in the teachings about women, submission and power in faith communities. In developing societies such as Nigeria, this “shift” according to Izugbara (2004b) is merely an increase in women’s participation in roles that are largely feminine such as Sunday school teachers, catechists, women leaders and mentors.

### **Historical Construction of Sexuality and Context of Sex**

Sexuality is socially constructed and as such it remains a complex phenomenon influenced by social norms, culture, and personal experience (Fine 1993; Laws & Schwartz 1977; Villanueva 1997). Thus, it is vital to unpack the complexities around sexuality and the context of sex. Even with the remarkable progress made in developed societies on feminist-based studies of female sexual experiences (Aune 2002, Lowe 2016), the situation in developing societies remains one where “the majority of the research in sexuality has been based on the sexual experiences of what society thinks is the norm: male heterosexuality” (Osmond, 1993, p. 616). To this effect, women's diverse sexual experiences and their complexities are rarely addressed in contemporary research, a situation that has been highlighted in recent studies such as Egan (2013). In general, the works of Baber (1994), Egan (2013) and Villanueva (1997) have all noted that even when studies are conducted on the diverse sexual experiences of women; it is usually to perpetrate hegemonic patriarchal socio-cultural and religious norms. In reaction to this, one key intention of my study is to look at the sexual experiences of unmarried young women in a developing patriarchal society such as Nigeria, from a feminist standpoint.

Studies such as Brickell (2006); Brecher (1969); Foucault (1976); Izugbara (2008); Neiterman (2012); and Villanueva (1997) have all highlighted how the meaning, context and interpretation of sex has endured changes in its construction in different societies over the years. As a consequence of social construction, history records that the majority of research on female sexuality has been based on patriarchal and biological perspectives, and on the experience of Euro-American, class-privileged, heterosexual men (Villanueva 1997). As Egan (2013) puts it, the way we think about girls and their sexuality is shaped by the discourses and cultural narratives we produce about it. To this effect, active

features of social constructionism such as power, language and knowledge (Foucault 1976) are used by society to contextualise and construct female sexuality and sex to benefit and serve the interest of men (Burr 1995). Again, as much as Foucault remains fundamental to poststructuralism, especially in view of how he looked at power, language and knowledge, he appears to have paid little attention to gender. However, poststructuralist feminist have undertaken remedial work in this area. Early studies such Brecher (1969) and more recent studies such as Egan (2013) have helped to draw attention to how women's knowledge of their own bodies is limited by this framework, a framework society adopts in the construction of female sexuality. These studies have all produced narratives that underscore the extent to which sexual activity is focused on the satisfaction of men at various times in history.

In the Victorian era, the religious construction of womanhood was largely along the lines of virtuousness and piety, thus "good mothers" are those who are virtuous and pious, who remained virgins until marriage. This construction draws attention to the age-old relationship between religion and sexuality. In fact, Foucault's early lines of thought enhance the need for close attention to be paid to the connection between sexuality and religion. As Foucault (1976) noted, confession was used as a weapon of sexual control, as much as the church was used to police the sexuality of members of the society. Victorian Christian views as articulated in Ellis (1936) were mainly an expression of sexual repression of female sexuality. This was a time when women who explored their sexuality were largely perceived as deviants. Such Victorian Christian views about women's sexuality have faced firm opposition for decades, especially from sexuality writers such as Ellis (1936) and Vallanueva (1997). They emphasised that female sexuality is normal and not a deviant phenomenon. The majority of the literature reviewed here will look at the construction of womanhood and women's bodies across various historical epochs in Africa, especial among Christian communities in Nigeria.

Although there is a significant improvement on Brecher's (1969) earnest worries about the scarcity of female-centred feminist research on sexuality, this improvement is mostly visible in developed societies in Europe and America. On several grounds, socially constructed discourse is believed to be the fundamental reason for this regional differentiation, mainly because "we construct our own version of reality between us as a culture or society" (Burr 1995, P. 6). Thus, the construction of sexuality in Western Europe would hardly be the same as the construction of sexuality in Western Africa. However, Burr's supposition could also mean that some realities are constructed and handed over to a subordinate section of the society by a superior one. For instance, and as will be discussed below, some studies in Nigeria such as Izugbara (2004b), have blamed European colonialism for the construction and discourse of female sexuality as inferior and men's as superior.

## European Constructs

Scholars such as Izugbara (2004b) believe that pre-colonial Nigerian society was largely egalitarian with significant equality of the sexes. Ako-Nai (2013) stressed that leadership of the cults and shrines in African cosmology does not lie solely with men. She argued that priestesses were and are still important in the socio-political and religious lives of the people, such that goddesses were revered in their respective societies, and their priestesses had a voice in the organisation and development of the communities. Ako-Nai (2013) further maintained that while Africa (including Nigeria) operated a system in which women and men play vital roles in the religious, economic, social and political lives of their people, men in Western religious practices were the dominant actors, while women played mainly peripheral roles in the church. In Chapter One, I followed Butler's notion of gender performativity to lay the foundation for the enhancement of the line argument put forward by scholars like Ako-Nai (2013) and Izugbara (2004b). Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the issues surrounding the socially constructed notion of gender; the idea that gender is largely a performative repetition of acts associated with female or male.

In any case, I do not intend to cover the debate on whether patriarchy existed in Nigeria before colonialism or if colonialism brought patriarchy to Nigeria. I however uphold that a fundamental impact of Western colonialism in Nigeria is that those behind it were not only patriarchal men, but they were also determined, and eventually succeeded in enshrining their patriarchal position as the tenet of Nigerian society. As previously mentioned, one of Foucault's specific views on power is that power should not be seen simply as some form of possession, which some people have and others do not, but as an effect of discourse (Foucault 1976). As well as the state apparatus of being "colonial masters", colonialism brought with it to Nigeria discourses that empowered one gender and disempowered another. Burr theorised along these lines and warned that "when we define or represent something in a particular way, we are producing a particular 'knowledge' which brings power with it" (Burr 1995, p. 64). Examples abound in the Nigerian colonialism narrative highlighting how Western knowledge brought with it power, and unequivocally handed such powers to men. I have looked at some of such examples here.

In Nigeria, the arrival of the missionary and colonial rule came with the Victorian construction of womanhood and manhood; wherein man is constructed as the coloniser of virgin territories. This advent took a patriarchal posture by coming with a notion that constructed male along the lines of "governance, work, militancy, power, leadership, and female as "followership, submission, idleness, activity and home" (Izugbara 2004b, p. 21). For instance, on their arrival in Eastern Nigeria, the British, who appropriated power in Nigeria, did not only recognise the male *obi*, [male monarch], they also offered him a monthly salary. On the contrary, the colonial masters completely ignored the female *omu*, [female monarch] hence they succeeded in defining women as subjects of men's rule (Izugbara 2004b;



Tamale 2000). Izugbara (2004b) also stressed that colonial norms of gender discrimination play out very well in their emphasis on 'able-bodied men' as the most important qualification needed to work as guides, servants, tax collectors, cleaners, and stewards for the colonizers. He argued that by reproducing and reconstituting meanings of gender and culture, colonial state policies constructed natives in ways that invested control over everybody in the colonizer and those native men who have absorbed European ideologies. He further argued that the colonial lockout of women as the 'unable other' casts femininity as subordinate and inferior. He maintained that "the important role of men as rulers and their natural superiority emerged as the proper order of things" (Izugbara 2004b, p. 21). The strength of Izugbara's postulations is amplified in Allanana (2013), as she maintained that unfair social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females.

### **Colonial Education**

Colonial schools in Nigeria were set up as sites for the production and regulation of sexual identities informed by the Victorian vision of the natural position of men and women in society (Izugbara 20004b). In such schools, most of which were single-sex, socialisation followed specific directions wherein boys were taught civics, law, and politics to equip them for leadership and control. Education for women was geared towards sustaining their role as housewives, home keepers, and the inferior 'other' such that they were taught domestic skills, nutrition, home economics, and management. "As in imperial Europe, not only were educational opportunities disproportionately provided to Nigerian males, men's education was also accorded higher priority than that of women" (Izugbara 20004b, p. 22). The desire of several Nigerian men to Europeanise, and the huge loyalty commanded by the colonial elite, ensured that such inequalities in education succeeded with no objections. Izugbara gave a vivid account of this and noted that the readers and textbooks officially permitted for use in Nigerian primary and secondary schools normally contain stories of boys who run, kill snakes, ride bicycles, fight, travel out of the home on holidays, go fishing, play football, are hard, rough, help their fathers in changing tyres or painting the house, and who want to be policemen, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, or politicians. On the contrary, girls appear in these stories as people who sit, sweep, sing, clap, help their mothers cook, run when they see snakes, fear to leave the house, stay at home to watch TV and movies, get sick, keep quiet, are soft, and want to be nurses, secretaries, models, and newscasters (Izugbara 2004b). Again this is linked to Butler's notion of performing gender identities (Butler 1999) discussed previously. These ideologies, informed by patriarchy, became common social constructions and dominant discourses within Nigerian society.

Elements of these constructions and discourses have remained evident in Nigeria's education sector. In fact, Izugbara (2004b) went further, painting a picture of how the advent of African feminism failed to

challenge male domination of key sectors of the economy. The premature celebration of increasing educational and employment opportunities by African women inadvertently created leeway for sustained male domination. He argued that in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, the feminist movement of the 1970s was built on an analysis and critique of the official discourse which claimed that modernization had solved the gender question. Although the rise in employment opportunities for women, the appointment of women into leadership positions, and building of schools have allowed women to participate more actively in nation-building; official activities continue to associate men with leadership and women with followership (Izugbara 2004b). Social constructionists argue that representations of people (e.g. as free individuals, as masculine or as well educated) can serve to support power inequalities between them, while passing off such inequalities as fair or somehow natural (Burr 1995; Foucault 1976). The foundations of Western education in Nigeria were built on these grounds.

To a large extent, socialisation in colonial schools aimed at denying or forbidding the struggles over sexual identities by young people, because sexuality was taken as a given which could not be negotiated. Even as the focus of my study is largely on heterosexual relationships, I agree with Desai (2000) who argued that in Nigeria, the (false) binary of male and female was taken as a natural order and hence sexual behaviour and identity was taught in gendered terms. Similarly, Izugbara (2004b) argued that having been portrayed as the sexually backward other, Nigerians, like other colonized people sought to resist these negative images by denying homosexuality as an indigenous cultural practice; they have expressed “heteronormality” and their allegiance to heterosexist patriarchal values which celebrate male superiority and cast women and their body as objects of control, subjugation, and subordination by men. A key element of this narrative is that conforming to heterosexuality and the avoidance of premarital sex becomes a means of gaining respectability, such that virginity and not being homosexual is valorised in today’s Nigerian society.

### **Construction of sex and Negotiation**

Sexual negotiation between men and women in Nigeria is tailored in such a way that all authority is allocated to men. While stressing that lay discourses on sexuality in Nigeria inscribe superiority on men and to the “penis”, Izugbara (2004a) also noted that the interpretation of sexual relations between male and female gives a scenario where “boys generally held a penis-centred view of sex and tended to liken sexual intercourse and relationships with girls to encounters during which girls were conquered, subdued and demystified” (Izugbara 2004a, p. 63). As to why and where such notions of sex held by boys developed, he noted that parents tend to frame the lives of boys in terms of risk-taking and adventure, and as a result they tend to let them experiment with everything, including sex (Izugbara 2008). Aside from highlighting the issue of power dynamics and gendered inequality, it also draws

attention to discourse - as the way knowledge is produced through language (Wetherell et al. 2007). As will be highlighted further below, the everyday language with which sexual activity and other related issues are discussed in Nigerian societies denote male domination. According to Izugbara (2004a), the notions shared among young boys about sexual relationships with the opposite sex are formed and sustained within the cultural context of their local communities. That views such as those highlighted above by Izugbara are held, practiced and shared in communities may not surprise theorists such as Wetherell et al. (2007), as they argued that discourse is not just to be seen as a linguistic concept, as it is also about what one says (language) and what one does (practice). Therefore, discourse governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about and influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.

Sex in virtually all Nigerian societies is framed along the lines of dominant hegemonic patriarchal discourse. As Izugbara (2004a, p.18) pointed out, “the key message in these narratives is that women are a gift to men and should be so pleasantly. A woman’s pleasure will then be in giving the man what and how he wanted”. He stressed that a woman is expected to curb her own desire. Thus, “women who fail to align to this patriarchal order are cast aside as nymphomaniacs and whores. By centralizing the penis, lay sexuality discourses in Nigeria marginalize women’s genitals, sexual desire, and pleasure and make them to appear evil” (Izugbara 2004a, p.18). One danger of condoning these dehumanising notions of sex and sexualisation of women’s bodies is that powerful male beneficiaries of such social constructions ensure they are sustained and shared within and between communities.

Sexual negotiation in Nigerian societies usually place men in control, such that they decide when, how and where a woman should have sex. This is a major contributor to the numerous incidents of rape and unsafe abortion in Nigeria, many of which are unreported (Okonofual et al. 2009). This is also the main reason why the few reported cases of rape are not prosecuted. In relation to examining how rape is constructed in Nigeria, Burr (1995) held that descriptions or constructions of the world sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others. As stressed by Isherwood (2004), the sexual negotiation narrative in Nigeria depicts a scenario where women’s lack of autonomy, their inferiority and unworthiness begin to be embodied, such that women then become the ‘unimportant’ other because they do not possess the penis. The erroneous gendered construction of female sexuality in Nigerian societies portrays men as destined to be satisfied by women. This also fulfils the narrative of heterosexuality.

## Discourse and Language of Sex

In most developing societies, such as the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria, the cultural construction of sexuality as an adult affair means that parents and children feel uncomfortable, embarrassed and anxious when discussing sexual matters (Izugbara 2008). Such societies in their everyday discourse largely feel that to speak of “penis” and “vagina” is inappropriate, and as such people usually relegate them to the realm of concealment such that words used to describe female and male sexual parts of the body and the act of having sex are inexact (Izugbara 2008). For instance, vagina is described as *ihe umu nwanyi* (women’s thing), *ahu umu nwanyi* (women’s body), and *ihe iji buru nwanyi* (that which makes a woman). Menstruation is also often described as *ihe umu nwanyi* (women’s thing), *ino na obara* (to be discharging blood), and *ihu obara* (seeing blood) (Izugbara 2008). Although responses in Izugbara’s study also showed that the “penis”, unlike the “vagina”, was more likely to be called by its local name *amu*, parents also often described it figuratively as *ihe umu nwoke* (men’s thing) and *ahu umu nwoke* (men’s body). From Izugbara’s study, sexual activity was also figuratively described as *ime ihe* (to do something), *ime ihe asoghi anya* (to be involved in an immoral act), and *ihe iberibe* (irresponsible behaviour) (Izugbara 2008). These framings of sexual parts of the body and sexual activity are embedded into society’s everyday discourse through various key social institutions such as the family and the church (Foucault 1976). Foucault held that these institutions are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that sexual matters are kept away from daily public discourse. He maintained that mainstream society also position these institutions and agents of socialisation as gatekeepers of individual’s sexual behaviours. Whilst Foucault (1976) had rightly raised concerns regarding the construction, repression and confinement of sexual issues to the bedroom by adults; I echo this, and argue that such construction, repression and confinement will neither help young people (especially young women), nor the entire society.

## Young People and Sexual Activity

Irrespective of the silence and language ambiguity around matters of sex, it is virtually impossible for young people in developing societies to be disengaged with sex and issues of sexuality. This is mainly because studies have shown that young people are not only interested in their own sexuality, it is also a primary aspect of their lives (Bankole and Malarcher 2010; Izugbara 2004a; Izugbara 2008; Pattman 2005; Smith 2000). For instance, data from Bankole and Malarcher (2010) showed that in developing societies, up to 21% of young women have had sex by age 15, up to 59% by age 18 and up to 77% by age 20. With the average age of sexual debut among young people in Nigeria at 13.5 (Izugbara 2004a), these figures again raise questions regarding who should provide sexual education to young people, and if in fact anyone has taken that responsibility.

While the above figures indicate that young people in Nigeria are largely sexually active, it is important to also look at this as a product of various socio-cultural and economic factors. Accordingly, Burr argued that “the version of youth that a person can live out is affected by the discourses of ethnicity, gender, class and so on that she or he is subject to” (Burr 1995, p. 52). Burr’s postulation suggests that young people’s sexual life is not to be constructed by adults; neither should it be constructed by those who do not consider the socio-cultural and demographic parameters. The summary here is that the version of youth expressed by an individual is largely subject to his or her ethnicity, gender and social class. This is to say that the construction of sexual activity for a young unmarried woman in a South-Eastern Nigerian Christian community is not exactly the same as the construction a young woman of the same age would have in a Muslim community in Northern Nigeria. Such societal differential framings and discourses contribute to the challenges faced by young unmarried women, as will be discussed later in this chapter. In any case, I agree with Bankole and Malarcher (2010) that contrary to the view of many parents and community leaders, adolescents engage in sexual activity, and as such, these young people suffer grave consequences in societies that deny this reality and fail to prepare them adequately for sexual experience.

### **Sex Education, Contraception and Abortion**

Despite the increasing number of young people embarking on sexual activities (Bankole and Malarcher 2010; Izugbara 2004a), current sexual and reproductive health information and services do not meet the needs of many adolescents (Bankole and Malarcher 2010; Okonofua et al. 2009). Even with many young women experiencing consensual sex as opposed to rape and other forms of sexual violence, detailed knowledge about how to prevent an unintended pregnancy is low among these young women (Bankole and Malarcher 2010; Okonofua et al. 2009). A closer look at sex education, contraception and abortion will further buttress this point.

Although the use of contraceptives can prevent unwanted pregnancy and thus reduce the need for abortion, in 2009, Okonofua and his colleagues found that only a handful of family planning programmes have been established in Nigeria. Going back to 2003, when the prevalence of modern contraceptive use among women in Nigeria was at 8%, one of the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa, Okonofua et al. (2009) found that this has not changed significantly. In Southern Nigeria, the use of contraceptives among young unmarried women is below seven percent. In addition, two out of every three sexually active young Nigerians (Izugbara 2004a) get infected with one or more sexually transmitted infection before reaching the age of 25.

Few parents discuss sex with their children and they often refrain from mentioning condoms and contraceptives as they believe that such teachings invariably mean encouraging young people to have sex and become promiscuous (Izugbara 2008). These parents associate condoms and other contraceptives with modernity, which they believe is against traditional norms of childbearing and biblical teachings; hence they rarely educate their children about contraception. In his study of 187 parents, Izugbara (2008) found that only 39% (73) discuss sex with their children. From the 73, the majority were women, while only 15 (21%) were men. Of the parents that discussed sexuality issues with their children, Izugbara (2008) found that such parents compound the difficulties the young person encounters in accessing accurate and adequate sexuality information by giving them inexact information. For instance, a female participant in Izugbara's study narrated how she told her daughters that they would get pregnant if they allow a man to see or touch their breast, buttocks, and stomach; another woman reported telling her daughters that they would become pregnant if they saw a man's penis. Parents are said to tell these stories in their attempt to get their daughters further away from sex and men.

Many of the sexuality challenges faced by young people can be attributed to poor governmental policy implementation and other structural factors (Okonofua et al. 2009). In Nigeria, abortion is illegal and is only permitted to save the life of a woman (Okonofua et al. 2009). Thus, any woman who is caught obtaining an abortion for any other reason is subject to a jail term of up to seven years while the provider of such abortions, if convicted, can be jailed for up to 14 years (Makinwa-Adebusayo 1997; Okonofua et al. 2009). Findings from Makinwa-Adebusayo (1997) and Okonofua et al. (2009) indicate that the dominant socio-political and religious discourse/construction of abortion in Nigerian communities is that it is illegal, a sin against God, and a shameful act.

A study by Okonofua and his colleagues in 2009 found that 760,000 induced abortions are performed in Nigeria each year. This is equivalent to an annual rate of 25 per 1,000 women aged 15-44, and these figures may be an underestimation of the true incidence of the procedure, due to the clandestine nature of such abortions (Okonofua et al. 2009). Even though young people in Southern Nigeria are said to become sexually active around the age of 12-13 years, they often have little clear knowledge of how to use contraceptives at 15-19 years of age, hence their reliance on unsafe abortion is high (Bankole and Malarcher 2010; Otoide et al. 2001; Salako et al. 2006). Reports from Salako et al. (2012) showed that unmarried adolescents in Nigeria constitute 80% of the hospital cases of complications from unsafe abortion in Nigeria.

Just like many other countries, the government of Nigeria has approved a national curriculum for sexuality education in primary and secondary education institutions (Bukola and Malarcher 2010; Okonofua et al. 2009). Despite these efforts, evidence shows that the majority of young people are still not being taught vital information on these topics in their schools (Bankole and Malarcher 2010). Socio-cultural and religious beliefs are the common reasons why young people are not taught vital information in schools. Okonofua et al. (2009) found that among policymakers, as well as other anti-abortion and anti-contraception groups, religious and moral concerns are the most common reasons for these groups and individual's opposition to liberalisation of abortion laws in Nigeria.

It is equally important to stress that not all primary and secondary school age children are enrolled in education (Bankole and Malarcher 2010). While the government advocates for a universal basic education programme with the aim of ensuring that every child gets primary and junior secondary education, the reality is that some Nigerian children are unable to attend school for several reasons, including poverty and geographical location. Bearing this in mind, Bankole and Malarcher (2010) expressed concerns about school-based sex education. They argued that since not all young people in Nigeria go to or stay in primary or secondary school, programmes that are school-based cannot be adequate. While questions about the delivery of sex education in schools abound, it is also important to look at the stance of other social institutions such as the church with regards to young people and sex.

### **Sex, Christianity and Young People**

Christianity in Africa has wielded an important direct influence on many groups in the region for more than 100 years (Smith 2010). The church is one of the sources of identity or meaning making for young people (Ngcobo 2009). In Nigeria, Christianity started with a largely conservative norm with early churches like the Catholics and Anglicans (Ojo 2005; 2011). Presently, more churches (Pentecostals) have sprung up with more liberal doctrines, while several church goers are still hugely influenced by some of their old traditional norms and values (Ojo 2005; 2011). To this end, Barton (1994) argued that the direction of the interpretation of sexuality issues by churches is mainly influenced by the character (norms and values) and the history of the communities that make up the membership of those churches. Thus, some interpretations of biblical injunctions and dogmas make it difficult for parents and church members (including policymakers and government officials) to teach young people how to navigate through sex related issues (Okonofua et al. 2009). In their research, Okonofua et al. (2009) noted that policymakers did not challenge the validity of some religious beliefs that adversely affect women's access to and use of contraceptives partly because of their own conviction about the importance and relevance of religion.

The belief that man (Adam) is God's first born and that woman (Eve) is an afterthought reverberates all through Christianity, especially the Christian communities in developing societies such as those found in Nigeria. This belief laid the foundation for the general ill-treatment of women and their perception in Christianity as "weaker vessels" and "help mates" that were only provided to satisfy the sexual and other desires of the man. To drive home this message of female subordination, the church itself (Izugbara 2004b) is often constructed as the bride of Christ, who expects absolute chastity, faithfulness, and purity from her; thus, she must strive to meet these basic requirements to be acceptable to the groom.

Today, there is still a huge ambiguity surrounding the connection between religion, morality and sexuality of young Nigerians. Smith (2010, p. 426) noted that "for some, religious views serve as reason for abstinence; for others, religion provides a justification for the morality of certain sexual relationships (and therefore the lack of risk in those relationships); and for some others, such views are a source of ambivalence and denial, when sexual behaviour cannot legitimately fit into a Christian framework, but people are nonetheless affected by powerful moral sanctions" (Smith 2010, p. 426). The teaching of Christian communities is that premarital sex is a sin and members are enjoined to maintain abstinence until marriage (Ngcobo 2009). Faith communities in Africa (for instance in Nigeria) usually have a rigid attitude towards premarital sex; hence they generally advocate abstinence before marriage, and premarital sex in this case is considered a sin for which there are serious consequences (Ngcobo 2009). Such consequences do not only come after death by the individual being judged by God, but also here on earth by way of stigmatisation, isolation, and other forms of punishment. Both Ojo (2011) and, Smith (2000) agreed that this is largely the situation among faith communities in Southern Nigeria where nearly the entire population are predominantly Christian.

Though most Christian communities (churches) in Southern Nigeria preach against premarital sex, they are said to have done little in providing young people with choices and answers on issues and questions relating to sex and sexuality education (Ojo 2005). In Nigeria, it is common knowledge that Catholics have always vehemently criticized the use of contraceptives and abortion. Similarly, Ojo (2005) also expressed concern over the rejection of the use of condoms or any other form of contraceptive device, except total abstinence, by prominent Pentecostal pastors. For instance, a popular Protestant church in their 2005 convention made young people pledge sexual abstinence until marriage (Ojo 2005). Evidence highlighted earlier in this chapter suggests that this approach does not stop young people from having sex. Although they preach abstinence, record of the efforts of these churches in teaching young people how to navigate through sexuality is still lacking. There is still an unanswered question about why young people are made to make these faith-based pledges without considering the impact such a pledge would have on the everyday life of a young person. Such questions become even more vital



considering the pressure placed on young peoples' sexuality by their parents, peers, extended family, school, and church community (Smith 2000; Sharma 2008; Ojo 2011). Considering the increasing access by young people to modern technology and the internet, one would question why churches are reluctant to improve and expand their teachings on sexuality in line with technological advancements. Foucault's (1976) notion that religious institutions desire to use power to control the sexuality of their members would provide some answers to these questions.

Most of the reviewed literature in the preceding sections clearly suggest that churches and other agents of socialisation in Nigeria have for several decades discouraged young people's involvement with any form of sexual activity. These agents of socialisation have in fact constructed opposing discourses to negate young people's interest in their own sexuality. They have also adopted several other approaches, especially in relation to the construction of the language of sex to discourage young people from embarking on any form of sexual activity. Regardless of these efforts, the increasing rate of unmarried teenage pregnancy in Nigeria (as discussed in Chapter One) points to the failure of these approaches. More importantly, the reasons behind societal demands for virginity and their attitudes towards premarital sex are not far removed from the way motherhood is constructed. A look at the construction of married and unmarried motherhood will throw more light on this.

### **Construction of Motherhood**

Motherhood has been viewed as different things by different people at different times. For instance, by way of definition, "a mother is someone with a job, a role, and a clear sense of identity. A mother has great responsibility and authority; mothering gives a clear purpose to life" (Ngcobo 2009, p. 10). Writing about motherhood and mothers in African and in Nigeria, Adogame et al. (2013) noted that women play various significant roles as carers, mothers, and teachers. The status of motherhood itself (one being addressed as a mother) is an important motivation in favour of pregnancy (Ngcobo 2009). This link between motherhood and womanhood also adds complexity to the understandings of pregnant teens. For instance, Rosenau (2002) listed possible incentives which may encourage some young unmarried women to venture into motherhood: the belief that bearing children is a way of showing one's partner that one is committed to him and the belief by most people that sexual experience prior to marriage is necessary for one's own psychological, emotional and relational development. To put it simply, I agree with Wetherell et al. (2007) that the notion of motherhood, just like any other discourse, varies from society to society at particular moments in time; thus, married and unmarried motherhood will be discussed here on this basis.

Like other societal issues that are also constructed socially, the mirror with which motherhood is viewed is provided by what Burr (1995) referred to as wider social concepts and values. A key implication of these constructions is that motherhood is largely perceived differently in terms of unmarried and married, adult and teenage. Historically speaking, Jekayinfa (2005) noted that child bearing is one constant factor that largely determines the division of labour in pre-industrial society. Today in developed societies, feminist theorists argue that the role division which is seen in present-day societies and the social construction of motherhood as a natural and biological imperative operates to restrict women to a mothering role (Ulrich and Weatherall 2000). This role division also “denies women agency by construing them as being governed by forces beyond their conscious control” (Ulrich and Weatherall 2000, p. 328). To situate this in societal patriarchal norms challenging motherhood, Page (2010) noted that the ongoing argument by many feminists is that motherhood is institutionally created to serve the needs of patriarchy. It is important to mention that the way in which motherhood is constructed even in developed societies is largely linked to patriarchal cultures.

Some informants interviewed in Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) held that women’s reasons for wanting children include motherhood as a “natural instinct”, as a stage in the development of a relationship, and as a social expectation. However, if one is to look at motherhood simply as a “natural instinct” with regards to the biological childbearing role of females, it still does not fully explain motherhood as a sociological concept. The lived reality of motherhood questions the biological imperative. For instance, Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) maintained that these reasons why women want children (as stated above) were used to construct motherhood as physical, psychological and social completeness as well as fulfilment for women. In any case, this thesis focuses on motherhood mainly as a social construction. As Cornwall (2002) stressed, the social construction of femininity is also largely found in developing societies such as Nigeria where women are expected to aspire to become mothers through marriage.

With regards to power relations, the higher authority and decision-making role of men in comparison to women is said to be embedded in the cultures and customs of the Nigerian society, especially in rural communities (Idyorough 2005). Writing on South-Western Nigerian communities, Cornwall (2002) noted that normative discourse on female sexuality place emphasis on control of women. Thus, women are expected to marry and remain married to care for their children and spouse as their primary concerns, rather than pursuing careers or having extra-marital relationships. According to Cornwall (2002, p. 966), “once women have children, they are expected and enjoined by others, to put up with unsatisfying relationships so that they can be there to look after their children”. This may explain why women are expected to remain in unhappy relationships and/or marriages which hugely contribute to the many motherhood challenges faced by women in Nigeria.

In relation to child bearing, another motherhood issue in Nigeria is concern about how quickly or slowly the woman falls pregnant after marriage, as well as a wide-ranging preference for male children (Idyorough 2005). Married women are largely expected to get pregnant immediately after marriage; they consequently face stigmatisation when there is delay in pregnancy and child bearing (Cornwall 2002; Idyorough 2005). Cornwall (2002) paradoxically found that members of these same societies who want a newly married young woman to get pregnant immediately after marriage also complain that newly married women get pregnant too early without having an established career, and a means of supporting themselves.

Similarly, women who give birth to only female children are also criticised, and in some instances labelled with various derogatory names, such that in most Nigerian cultures, the birth of a male child is often heralded with greater joy than that of a female child (Izugbara 2004b). In some communities in Northern Nigeria, there are reports that a woman who gives birth to a female child undergoes a purification rite to cleanse her from the pollution and ill-luck associated with female children (Izugbara 2004b; Usmanu 1999). Although women are actively involved in these practices, society appears to ignore men, who, biological and medical science informs us, are mainly responsible for the Y chromosomes and therefore the reproduction of male babies. Men are also said to express their preference for a male child in the names they give to their children. The arrival of an eagerly anticipated male child among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria is welcomed with huge celebrations where names such as *Obiesiemike*, (my heart is strengthened), *Ebisike* (I now live stronger), *Nwokedi* (there is a man here), *Obiajulu* (my fear has calmed), and *Obinna* (the heart of the father) are given to the child. On the contrary, a female child is usually named to illustrate frustration and an obvious preference and anticipation for a male. She would be given names such as *Nkechinyere* (Whatever God gives), *Chikanele* (in God, I continue to trust), *Otuomasirichi* (however God wants it) (Izugbara 2004b). This aspect of the construction of motherhood leaves women in a place of frustration and rejection. Bearing in mind that the male preference discussed here is associated with childbearing in marriage relationships; my study also considers the preferred sex when the child is from an unmarried mother.

### **Construction of Unmarried Pregnancy**

Pregnancy/motherhood in marriage is usually constructed as a highly desirable event, rather than an unfortunate accident; it is a model of motherhood which pregnant teens are unfairly accused of deviating from (Neitera 2012). Social construction is the simple reason why the historically common event of young women having children has become a moral concern (Fonda et al. 2013). Historically, in developed societies, unmarried pregnant teens were secretly sent away to have their babies and give them up for adoption, while some were forced into marriage or having abortions (Fonda et al. 2013).

Developed societies have however witnessed a shift in concern from “marriage” to “age” in reaction to pregnancy (Arai 2009). Today, marriage is a lesser concern in many communities; it seems there is more tolerance in such societies for young mothers (Arai 2009). A key factor to this is that it is now considered harmful in Western societies, for a woman to be separated from her baby unless she is classified as an “unfit” mother. To a large extent, the changing attitudes in developed societies is a reflection of the loosening rigid patriarchal heterosexual motherhood standards, as members of such societies are becoming increasingly accepting of diverse experiences of motherhood in general; acknowledging not only teen mothers but also older mothers, queer mothers, and other women who previously would have been socially excluded (Gregory 2007). Even with some degree of consensus, there is variation in the way unmarried early pregnancy is constructed in various developed societies and as expected, its construction is largely different from that of developing societies.

In any case, developed societies such as those found in America still view teen pregnancy as a social problem (Duncan 2007). Unlike first-time older mothers, who are often highly-educated middle-class women with steady incomes and considerable political power (Gregory 2007), teenage mothers do not have the financial and social means to stand up for their rights, hence teen pregnancy is associated with poverty, drugs, unstable families, and unhappy babies (Arai 2009; Checkland and Wong 2000). Thus, Neiterman (2012) noted that teen mothers in America are constructed as placing a burden on the welfare state and on society as a whole.

To further highlight how social problems are socially constructed in different societies, teenage pregnancy in developed societies such as the UK is seen as a more concerning issue than unmarried pregnancy (Lowe 2016). Nonetheless, UK discourses on unmarried teenage motherhood has seen unmarried teenage pregnancy being viewed in different ways. To some, teenage pregnancy is connected with dubious conceptions by young women who want to exploit the benefits system; to some others, teenage pregnancy is a product of neglect and disregard of young women by those who should look out for them (Wallbank 2001; Whitehead 2000). It is however important to note that neither of these lines of thinking consider young women’s views. Young unmarried mothers in the UK are often described with negative terminologies such as “dole-scroungers and teenage pram pushers” (Tyler 2008, p. 21; Yardley 2008). It is also important to mention the impact of social class in relation to how teen mothers are perceived. For instance, working class teen mothers are more likely to be heavily sanctioned and viewed in terms of “benefit scroungers” (Tyler 2008; Yardley 2008). I may not have stressed the time in history when teenage pregnancy became a socially constructed problem, but the variant perceptions of teenage pregnancy mentioned here, gives credence to Burr’s (1995) keystone notion of socially constructed discourse; she held that the nature of language constantly changes and varies in its meaning.

Looking at developing societies such as Nigeria, the lack of a welfare state means that unmarried pregnancy has become a key source of socio-economic degradation for young unmarried women. In such societies, there is still a long way to go with regards to enshrining positive societal perceptions of unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood. As I will show later, most societies in Nigeria, for instance the Yoruba people of South-Western Nigeria manifest traits of stigmatisation in their discourse and construction of unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood. The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria also have a specific socially constructed notion of unmarried pregnancy which is mainly embedded and expressed in the language. As will be discussed in more detail in the stigmatisation section, the Yorubas and the Igbos have different but similar derogatory terms in the language and music they use to describe unmarried teenage mothers and their offspring (Agunbiade et al. 2009; Onyeocha 2013). In these societies, communal norms and values govern the reality of fertility, thus premarital fertility among adolescents is perceived as abhorrent. Society here is said to define, regulate and often remove young people's freedom of expressing their sexuality and the chances of exploring sexuality options. The authority of sexuality decision making is removed from the individual and deposited with the group.

In relation to how societal issues are constructed; cultural and social responses develop in social context and constantly changes over time (Burr 1995; Fonda et al. 2013). Thus, the nature of the discourse of teenage fertility and sexuality is not restricted to one society. When answering the question of whether unmarried teenage motherhood is an issue or not, Fonda et al. (2013) reiterated that this depends on whom you speak to, where you are coming from, and where you are located in history and the world. Unlike extreme poverty, famine, or protection against infectious disease, teen motherhood is not viewed uniformly around the world as an issue worth debating in the public sphere. In any case, whether it is pregnancy that causes poverty, or poverty that leads to pregnancy, teen mothers are seen as being limited in their opportunities to pursue education and to gain employment in their future lives (Unger et al. 2000). As previously stated, there are differences in societal perception of unmarried early pregnancy and this perception constantly changes within and between societies over time.

### **Stigmatisation Discourse and Construction of Unmarried Teenage Motherhood**

In chapter one, I introduced stigma and laid relevant foundation on the place it occupies in this thesis. In accordance with Goffman (1963), I argue that society constructs an ideology of stigma to explain an individual's inferiority and to account for the danger represented by the individual so as to rationalise its animosity towards that person. I posit that societal attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy are largely built around this notion of stigma to the detriment of the unmarried mother, especially in developing patriarchal societies. The applicability of Goffman's concept of stigma in this thesis is also in relation to the significant role of dominant social institutions and powerful individuals in the

construction and distribution of discrediting attributes to less dominant and less powerful social institutions and individuals. The significance of Goffman's notion of stigma is also in line with some of the key arguments by Foucault (1976), particularly those pertaining to power relations and its adverse effects on the less powerful members of society. To this end, Goffman's notion of stigma is applied in this thesis as a tool for examining the prevailing attitudes of Nigeria's powerful social institutions towards vulnerable young women who become pregnant outside of marriage. More importantly, this examination of societal stigmatisation of unmarried pregnancy is carried out on the platform of feminism in this thesis. With studies such as Agunbiade et al. (2009) and Izugbara (2004a) suggesting that the Nigerian society sets out disproportionate sanctions towards young women when compared with young men or with older women, premarital pregnancy and the stigma attached to it is viewed here with a feminist lens.

There are cultural variations in societal reactions towards unmarried teenage motherhood (Agunbiade et al. 2009; Whitehead 2000). In Britain for instance, the portrayal of teenage pregnant women is frequently one of contrast and polarization which vacillates between viewing teenagers who become pregnant as vulnerable, neglected and taken advantage of, to viewing them as devious, destructive and manipulative (Musick 1993 in Whitehead 2000; Yardley 2008). These divergent notions held by society further illustrate the gulf around the issues of unmarried pregnancy. Wallbank (2001) did not agree with those who perceive unmarried mothers as devious, she argued that the perception that the motivation for such young women is mainly the state welfare benefit money and the desire to secure council housing amounts to oversimplification.

Goffman (1963, p. 59) noted that "the social information conveyed by any particular symbol may merely confirm what other signs tell us about the individual, filling out our image of him in a redundant and unproblematic way". In Nigeria, pregnancy becomes a symbol used to convey negative social information about young women who become pregnant outside of marriage, such that when it becomes visible, it becomes an embodiment of shame for the bearer. For instance, in Southern Nigeria, there is a belief that some young women are motivated to get pregnant and become mothers, especially when the man is older, rich and married. Such women are believed to go for someone who they do not have to marry, but who is rich enough to look after them (Cornwall 2002; Okpani and Okpani 2000). In Cornwall's study, some young women believe that there is no security in marriage as the woman can be "sent away" (divorced) anytime. Those women who choose to stay single are portrayed as those who chase after men for money (Cornwall 2002). As supported by reviewed literatures on British and Nigerian societies, people's perception and portrayal of unmarried teenage motherhood is largely constructed within the tenet of their culture.

Several studies have highlighted more than a few challenges of motherhood encountered by women in both developed and developing societies (Agbalajobi 2010; Para-Mallam 2007; Wallbank 2001). These challenges appear to be more daunting when the woman is young and unmarried (Agunbiade et al. 2009; Ngcobo 2009; Phoenix 1991). As highlighted in Izugbara (2008), most parents believe that pregnancy and unmarried motherhood are the most embarrassing of the negative outcomes associated with adolescent sexuality. Women who become mothers when they are less than 20 years of age have been broadly reported to fare badly in comparison with women who become mothers later in life (Phoenix 1991). Looking at the experiences of teenage mothers, Phoenix (1991) noted that such young women raise children who do less well than the children of older mothers. In the UK for instance, they are expected to gain fewer educational qualifications than their peers and to be more likely to be unemployed or to be employed in poorly paid jobs (Phoenix 1991). Similarly, some young unmarried mothers in Southern Nigeria are said to be confronted with socio-cultural challenges right from the start of the pregnancy (Agunbiade et al. 2009; Amobi and Igwegbe 2004).

Most communities in Southern Nigeria negatively prejudge young mothers who become pregnant before marriage, and such young unmarried mothers face stigmatisation on this basis (Aderibigbe et al. 2011). Stigmatisation is said to come in various guises such as: name calling, banishment, and denial. For instance, Agunbiade et al. (2009) listed some of the derogative words used by the Yoruba people to describe teenage pregnancy. These words include: *oyun eleya/esin* (shameful or embarrassing pregnancy), *oyun ko yun* (unwarranted pregnancy) and *oyun ibanuje* (sorrowful pregnancy). As stated in Agunbiade et al. (2009), popular musicians among the Yoruba people have depicted how unmarried teenage pregnancy is stigmatised in some of their albums. They have also advocated against premarital sex and abortion. One of the artists (Adewale Ayuba) at one time in his music specifically described the consequences of unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood and labelled such pregnancy as *ile mosu* (a mother and a wife in one's parents' home). In Nigeria, a young woman who becomes a mother while still under the care of her parents and while living in her parents' home is labelled and stigmatised for not becoming a mother as a wife in her husband's home.

In South-Eastern Nigeria, unmarried teenage pregnancy in the local language (Igbo) is referred to as *ime mkpuke* (in-house pregnancy). This terminology is stigmatising as it suggests that the pregnancy is kept or hidden in the house due to shame. This also points to the stigmatisation of unmarried teenage mothers as expressed in the language used to describe such pregnancies. Even the Nigerian pidgin (broken) English language refers to unmarried pregnancy as *mistake belle* (mistake pregnancy). In some cases, as soon as it becomes public knowledge that the individual is pregnant, the unmarried pregnant teenager gets ostracised by her own family, community, school, church (Ngoobo 2009; Smith 2001). For instance, there are occasions where the young woman is stopped from attending school both

by her parents and the school, while some are stopped from attending and taking part in church activities by their church (Ngoobo 2009; Smith 2001).

Despite the high value placed on fertility within marriage, most cultures in Nigeria frown upon unmarried teenage motherhood. The situation of unmarried teenage mothers is made worse by Nigeria's unfavourable political economy, power relations, poor reproductive health facilities, religion and many other social factors (Agunbiade et al. 2009). The above stated factors contribute to the many reasons why the motherhood experience for young unmarried mothers in Southern Nigeria comes with many challenges, including stigmatisation of both the teenage mother and her child. Mother and child are constantly addressed by several derogative names which in most cases appears to follow them and dictate their life into adulthood (Agunbiade et al. 2009). Most members of the society tend to believe that such negative language of communication is functional as it serves as a deterrent for would-be unmarried mothers (Agunbiade et al. 2009). However, the majority of people fail to see the dysfunctional impact of such language to young mothers and their offspring who, according to Agunbiade et al. (2009) suffer adverse self-perception, lack of confidence and failure. Maliki (2012) noted that the effect of premarital teenage pregnancies and early motherhood on children is that they grow up in poverty. This poverty is in the sense that they are at great risk from having more health problems, they suffer from higher rates of abuse and neglect, they drop out of school, and they are likely to become teenage parents who may suffer failed marriages and other relationships challenges (Maliki 2012; WHO 2004).



## Chapter Summary

So far, it is evident that studies are lacking in exploring and understanding unmarried pregnancy and motherhood from women's experiences as members of various church denominations. Perspectives of the church on unmarried pregnancy, especially the laity, appear to have been scarcely researched. It is however palpable that young people in Nigeria make their sexual debut at a young age. With little or no sexuality education from parents and other gatekeepers, these young people (especially young women) have to contend with numerous risks associated with early premarital sex. Again, with the huge societal reverence of sex and fertility within marriage, young unmarried women who become pregnant are faced with the dilemma of either having a clandestine abortion or becoming an unmarried teenage mother, both of which the society frowns upon. There are also legal restrictions, religious and socio-cultural norms opposing abortion; in some cases, the use of contraceptives especially by young women is also restricted. A range of social actors including policymakers, healthcare providers, church leaders, and church members also stand against legalisation of abortion and the use of contraceptives. Several studies still point to an increasing rate of clandestine abortion and unmarried teenage pregnancy. However, as can be found in societies where dominant discourses are constructed by dominant social groups, most of these studies failed to seek the views of young unmarried women themselves.

In order to facilitate a consolidation of the discourses and construction of unmarried pregnancy, the views of young unmarried women themselves is a good place to start. Although studies have been conducted on young women's sexuality, the majority of such studies have mainly focussed on the use of contraceptives or abortion practice. In such cases, information is also gathered from individuals who uphold patriarchal ideologies or those who have been subjected to accepting such ideologies. As earlier stated, my intention is not only to conduct this study from a feminist standpoint, but to focus on unmarried pregnancy and motherhood, mainly from the point of view (experiences) of the unmarried mother.

The reviewed literature suggests that the popular discourse and construction of motherhood is that it is an integral part of the biological and social life of a woman. While one might see these social and biological expectations as motivating factors for women (young and adult) to embrace motherhood, it is equally clear that motherhood comes with several challenges. Such challenges are also more daunting when the mother involved is young and unmarried. Most importantly, these motherhood challenges (married and unmarried) stem from the discourses and construction of motherhood which are in most cases framed by patriarchal institutions and by those in positions of power in various societies.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this study is to investigate the range of attitudes of family and church members towards unmarried teenage pregnancy, as well as the experiences of young unmarried mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria. To achieve this goal, I have chosen to conduct a qualitative study. This methodology chapter will look at the qualitative methods, techniques and frameworks used in theory and in practice. With regard to my methods, I have looked at my choice of conducting qualitative one-to-one and focus group interviews as well as my use of snowballing and opportunistic sampling techniques. Having established the theoretical assumptions that underpinned this research and its intended implications in the previous chapters, this current chapter focuses on the empirical aspects of the study. To this effect, I have emphasised how I ensured that this study remained a pro-feminist poststructuralist study. While highlighting the various research tools used for this study, this chapter will also attempt to provide justification for such tools. It will commence with the establishment of the rationale behind this research project, followed by my epistemological positioning. I will then look at the groups targeted in this study and access negotiation into those groups. The next section will look at the methods and sampling tools employed in the study. It will then look at the fieldwork processes and the process of data collection. Before the section on method of analysis, I will look at some of my notes from fieldwork in relation to my positionality and reflexivity.

#### **Research Rationale**

This study involves participants who have experienced unmarried pregnancy, and may have experienced many adverse conditions as a result. Participants may be considered a vulnerable research population. Meanwhile, my positionality as a male researcher may be considered problematic, especially in relation to the potential research hierarchies involved. This issue has been at the centre of reflexive thinking from the very beginning of the research process. Therefore, I will demonstrate how this ethical dilemma has underpinned the whole project and how my attitude has shifted and changed in the process. Before discussing the question of how this study was conducted in the later part of this chapter, it is crucial that attention is drawn to the question of why this research problem is constructed. Having laid out the general aims and specific objectives of this study in Chapter One, it is equally important to look at the research questions that this study set out to answer as well as what prompted the construction of these research problems.

In practical terms, I do not have direct experience relating to unmarried teenage pregnancy. However, during my teenage years in the late 80s and early 90s, I saw many of my female secondary school

colleagues (aged between 13-17) leave school due to unplanned premarital pregnancy and early motherhood. Many of them faced several other sad and difficult challenges that left them with shattered dreams and unfulfilled ambitions. Some died during childbirth, some had to marry men who were old enough to be their fathers, and some had no money to feed either themselves or their babies. This largely informed my decision to conduct my final year first degree project on Teenage Pregnancy in 2003/2004. Although my project then was a quantitative study that focussed mainly on the causes of teenage pregnancy, I gathered from one of the young mothers who completed my questionnaire that her parents, who were both educated Christians, stopped paying her school fees and as a result, she was unable to continue with her education. Presently, my conviction is that early unmarried pregnancy is still a multifaceted social problem affecting not only the young woman but also her parents, her child, her local community and the general economy. As I explained earlier, while these socio-economic issues associated with unmarried pregnancy are found in virtually all countries (Amobi and Igwebge 2004; Ngcobo 2009; WHO 2004), its consequences are largely more pronounced in developing societies such as the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Due to the relevance of religion (in this case Christianity), the challenges of unmarried pregnancy to a young woman also become more marked, as faith communities frown on premarital sex and pregnancy (Ngcobo 2009). The need to bring these issues to the fore, especially from the point of view of young unmarried mothers left me with an unquenchable desire to embark on this research.

Consequently, in line with my research objectives, I developed the following four research questions:

RQ1: What are the experiences of young mothers and prevailing attitudes towards unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood?

RQ2: What are the effects of family and church-based stigmatisation of unmarried pregnancy on young unmarried mothers?

RQ3: What is the nature of unmarried young mothers' knowledge, access to and use of contraceptives as well as abortion practice?

RQ4: What is the nature of sex education given to young women in South-Eastern Nigeria?

The focus of this study is to provide answers to these research questions within the approved ethical standards of both the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

### **Epistemological Positioning: Pro-feminism**

The general aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of young unmarried mothers in Owerri, Imo State South-East Nigeria in relation to the range of attitudes of family and church members

towards these young mothers. Bearing in mind that this aim would entail looking at the various and numerous challenges of unmarried young women, this can be best achieved in line with feminism and feminist ideals. My commitment to feminism is echoed throughout this chapter and throughout the entire thesis. I agree with Frye (1983) and Lapierre (2007) that a feminist perspective is suitable for exploring the experiences of women and taking into account the forces that maintain their subordination. Thus, for the development of an epistemologically and ethically sound research design, a feminist perspective is considered fit, as it embodies a whole ethical system about gender discrimination and tackling it. Consequently, this study is not only conducted as a pro-feminist project, it is also aimed at contributing to a development of a feminist standpoint on the discourse of sexual relations between man and woman, particularly in patriarchal societies. In the words of Kelly et al. (1994, p. 28), feminism “is both a theory and practice, a framework which informs our lives. Its purpose is to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it. Our position as feminist researchers, therefore, is one in which we are part of the process of discovery and understanding and also responsible for attempting to enable change”. To this effect, this research project is geared towards highlighting the societal oppression of women, especially young women, as well as garnering support towards ending such oppression.

Although this is not the place to discuss them all, it is common knowledge that there is a long list of variant feminist perspectives. In any case, it is important to reiterate that this is a poststructuralist feminist study and as such, it entails a careful analysis of the discourses produced about gender and unmarried motherhood. This study also looks at the church's role in perpetuating any resulting discourses. Consequently, I consider it vital to state unequivocally that I align myself with the fight against all forms of discrimination against women, especially in developing societies such as Nigeria where socio-cultural or legal frameworks supporting equality of the sexes are in short supply. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) rightly stated, my belief is that women are suppressed in contemporary society because they suffer unjust discrimination. By adopting a pro-feminist standpoint, my intention in line with Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) is not to seek special privileges for women, but simply to demand that everyone is given equal consideration without discrimination on the basis of sex. Therefore, this research project is considered a pro-feminist study, which means that I used my commitment to feminism and the experiences of women as a starting point (Holmgren 2011; Lapierre 2007). As further highlighted in Lapierre (2007), it is my belief that research of this nature which involved a male researcher interviewing female participants can only be achieved through a strong commitment of the researcher (male) to feminism. Having commenced discussing my feminist standpoint in Chapter One, my intention is to consolidate the discussion here.

The connection between the experiences of women and the development of a feminist standpoint is neither automatic nor trouble-free (Lapierre 2007). Undeniably, the experiences of women do not take place outside of the realm of male domination and are influenced by patriarchal ideologies and structures (Thompson 2001). However, Kelly et al. (1994) warned about the dangers of equating women's experiences with feminist politics as if critical awareness and understanding are inscribed on a person through forms of oppression. Such dangers as highlighted by Kelly and colleagues are not only legitimate, but they are also more pronounced in developing patriarchal societies.

In any case, Page (2010) stressed that although feminist epistemology may not be unified and set, by having room for adaptability, it offers a rich range of fluid flexible choices and understandings, which also fits with poststructuralism. Again, considering the socio-cultural structure of South-Eastern Nigeria where this study was conducted, it is difficult to completely ignore the existential rigidity associated with binary opposites. As Page (2010) noted, feminist epistemology allows for a perception of binary categories more as a product of social construction rather than as a fixed state. This notion is employed in this thesis to view binaries such as women-men, masculinity-femininity, married motherhood-unmarried motherhood, legitimacy-illegitimacy as socially constructed within the discourse of the society under study.

### **Methods and Sampling Tools**

In line with my epistemological and ontological positioning, as well as the research questions this study set out to ask, a qualitative research approach was considered the most suitable. One major reason behind this choice is because qualitative research is more concerned about understanding individual perceptions of the world by seeking insight rather than statistical analysis (Bell 2000; Saunders et al. 2003). Although it can be argued that other research approaches also give insight, the variety of research methods and tools that are offered by a qualitative research approach (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010; Rowley 2012) makes it suitable for this study. For instance, a qualitative research approach allows researchers to conduct inductive studies; using research tools and approaches such as: in-depth interviews and focus group interviews (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010). Furthermore, a qualitative approach also complements a poststructuralist framework (Given 2008). This is mainly because by using qualitative research tools such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010), the researcher can identify meanings that are context specific, and that relate to the varying discursive practices in operation, both of which are vital aspects of poststructuralism (Given 2008).

Following earlier warnings in Foucault (1976) that society tends to keep discussions about sex vague with proper demeanour and verbal decency, I uphold that tools such as in-depth one-to-one and focus

group interviews provide the best prerequisite for getting rich narratives on matters relating to sex. If silence has indeed become the rule on the subject of sex, as Foucault (1976) held, attempting to get substantial data from potential participants with quantitative tools may only amount to a mere scratch in the surface. As my research will show, Nigerian society today is at that stage spoken about by Foucault (1976, p. 4); a time where “everyone knew that children had no sex which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closes one’s eyes and stopped one’s ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary”. Unmarried early pregnancy is glaring evidence that young people do have sex; thus, attempting to gather extensive and detailed information about this poses a challenge that requires the use of tools that would give both young people and adults the opportunity to talk. In-depth one-to-one and focus group interviews are such tools. The opportunity to explore and make use of some of these research tools that promise to dig deeper, facilitated my decision to conduct a qualitative study.

In the light of the above, I collected data through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews so as to generate comprehensive accounts from participants. In-depth interviews when used to generate detailed accounts help a researcher gain insight into, or understanding of, opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviours, or predictions (Rowley 2012). The choice of in-depth interviews was to understand and gain insight into these human differences and similarities in participants (Rowley 2012). Such detailed personal accounts also facilitate an understanding of cultural milieus and social worlds (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). As with several other societies elsewhere, Nigerian societies, especially those in the South-Eastern part of the country are known for their rich socio-cultural environment which can be explored by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews.

Another data collection tool incorporated into this study was focus group interviews. Focus group interviews were considered as one of the key data collection tools because focus groups are well suited for exploring sensitive topics, and more importantly for exploring collective norms (May 20005; Silverman 2006). Silverman went further, stressing that focus group interviewing is a useful data collection tool because the group context also facilitates personal disclosures (Silverman 2006). As my focus group interviews were targeted at existing collectives of people, connected through their place of worship, I was optimistic that this would enhance the discussions in terms of collective norms. I perceived that the ability of focus group interviews to explore group norms and dynamics (May 2005) would be helpful. Reassuringly, this feature of focus group interviews was evident all through this study, in terms of getting the views of group members. By employing these tools as advised in Denzin and Lincoln (1994), my aim was to concern myself with the socially constructed nature of reality by seeking to comprehend how social experiences are shaped, as well as what those experiences mean to the population under study.

### **Target Group, Sample Characteristics and Access**

This fieldwork was conducted in Owerri Imo State, located in the South-East of Nigeria, from March to June 2015. Participants were drawn from two major groups: unmarried young mothers and church/community members. Participants for both groups were identified through opportunistic and convenience sampling techniques as well as snowballing or chain sampling (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The basis for these choices of sampling techniques was to allow ease of access and the flexibility of utilizing available opportunities as they arose during fieldwork. It also gave room for potential participants to be recommended and identified by those already interviewed (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). These sampling techniques were viewed as largely convenient as they are generally adaptable. Even with these sampling tools, it is important to note that one key group covered in this study (unmarried mothers) is a difficult-to-access population. As a result of this, later in this chapter I will discuss in detail how these young women responded to my request to interview them, their expectations and apprehensions as well as several other ethical issues I encountered.

Having situated the life history accounts of young unmarried mothers as the focus of this entire research process, they were the first group targeted in this study. In-depth one-to-one interviews with young mothers focused on their involvement with sex, sex education, contraception, abortion, pregnancy and motherhood. Mothers who were interviewed included both those who were currently pregnant/nursing mothers and those who had become unmarried teenage mothers within the last ten years. The reason for this timespan was to explore not only the experience of those who were pregnant at the time of the study, but also to explore the unmarried motherhood experiences of those who had their baby in the recent past. At the time of interview, the majority of unmarried young mothers were residing at church-run homes for young unmarried mothers. Before going into the field, my intention was to interview twenty (20) teenage women who became unmarried mothers before their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, within a year period prior to the study. I also intended to interview ten (10) young mothers aged 20-30, who had become unmarried mothers within 10 years prior to the study. In the field, locating and negotiating access was a major challenge, especially for women who became unmarried mothers over the past 10 years. Locating those who were pregnant or became mothers within a one-year period prior to the study was also a challenge. This challenge was however ameliorated by the management of two separate church-run care homes for unmarried mothers. They listened to me and then spoke to their residents (the young mothers) about the possibility of granting me an interview. Unlike these two homes, another church-run care home for young mothers refused to allow me access to the young women and refused to speak to them on my behalf. My experience with gatekeepers will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **Sample Characteristics of Unmarried Young Mothers**

In all, twenty-five unmarried young mothers were interviewed. Twenty-one who were between the ages of 13-19 years were either pregnant at the time of the interview or had had their baby within the 12 months prior to the interview. The other four who were between the ages of 20-29 years were those who had had their baby within the last ten years prior to the interview. Consent of participants and that of their gatekeepers were sought prior to conducting any interviews. Every participant and/or gatekeeper was required to complete the information sheet and consent form. (See appendices E and F respectively). Getting gatekeepers to consent to this study was crucial in gaining access to the participants. Interview questions touched on participants' sexual encounters; sex education; knowledge, access to and use of contraceptives; abortion practice; pregnancy journey; stigmatisation and support. Access to unmarried young mothers was mainly facilitated through recommendations from church leaders, community leaders, healthcare officers and individual members of the community.

The young unmarried mothers who took part in this study share certain similarities in relation to some socio-economic indicators in terms of characteristics, such as employment and level of education. While they had varying levels of income; they also belonged to variant church denominations and they had different numbers of children. The biographical data of these young women as captured with a biographic data form (see appendix J) also pointed to key characteristics of their family background, by highlighting indicators such as parents' level of income and education. These personal characteristics discussed here are illustrated in tables in appendix C.

Within the first group (young unmarried mothers), the first set of participants (21 in number) aged between 13-19 years were either pregnant or became mothers within the 12 months prior to this study. The second set (4 in number) aged 20-29 years became mothers within the ten years prior to the study, making a total of 25 participants. One major reason for this choice of timespan is to look out for any significant difference in the experiences of those who became unmarried mothers at the time of the study in relation to those who became mothers in the past.

In terms of relationship status, of all 25 young mothers that were interviewed, twenty-four (24) participants were single while only one (1) participant was married. Twenty-two (22) participants had only one child (this number includes those still pregnant). One (1) participant had two (2) children, while two (2) participants had three (3) and above. Eleven (11) out of the twenty-five (25) participants were members of the Catholic Church. Five (5) participants were members of the Anglican Church; while nine (9) participants attended Pentecostal churches. At the time of interview, all participants had acquired some form of education prior to pregnancy. Four (4) went to primary school, eighteen (18)



went to secondary school while three (3) had one form of tertiary education or another. Eight (8) participants were unemployed, fourteen (14) were students, one (1) worked as a public servant, while two (2) were self-employed. Twenty-one (21) participants said they had no significant source of income, while four (4) earned below twenty thousand Nigerian Naira N20,000 (the equivalent of forty-two (£42) British pounds) per month, and below minimum wage in Nigeria.

Five (5) participants had mothers with no formal education; another five (5) had mothers who had attended only primary school. Nine (9) participants had mothers who went to secondary school while six (6) had mothers who went up to tertiary education. Eight (8) participants had mothers who were unemployed; no participant had a mother who was still studying. Five (5) had mothers who worked as public servants, while twelve (12) had mothers who were self-employed.

Three (3) participants had fathers with no formal education, six (6) had fathers who attended primary school, eight (8) had fathers who went to secondary school, while seven (7) have fathers with tertiary education qualifications. One (1) was unaware of the father's level of education. Five (5) participants had fathers who were unemployed. None of the participants had a father who was still a student. Four (4) participants had fathers who were public servants; while sixteen (16) had fathers that were self-employed.

### **Sample Characteristics of Church/Community Members**

For the second group involving church/community members, I made use of the snowballing/opportunistic sampling techniques discussed earlier in this chapter. In some cases, I approached various church denominations by introducing myself to a lay member who would then refer me to the clergy. In some other instances, I got introduced to the clergy or to the church association by individuals who had prior knowledge of my intentions. For instance, a friend introduced me to a member of the Anglican Church who agreed to mention my intentions to the vicar. Following this introduction, the vicar agreed to meet me to discuss further. In my meeting with the vicar, I informed him about my research and my intention to interview him and some members of his church on the church's (clergy and laity) views regarding premarital sex, sex education, contraceptives, abortion and unmarried pregnancy/motherhood. I made it clear that my project when published would include the position of his church on these issues. I also followed this approach while identifying the members of the Catholic and Pentecostal church who took part in the study.

One common factor that encouraged this group of participants to take part in this study was their intention to make known their position as individuals and the position of the church regarding issues pertaining to premarital sex and unmarried pregnancy. My situated identity, which, though complicated, had several positive and relevant aspects, also encouraged individuals to take part in my study. For instance, my insider/outsider positioning meant that I was viewed in most cases as someone who (according to one participant) “understands these issues” as a Christian, and as someone who was born and raised in the research setting. My insider/outsider identity as someone who although was born and raised in the setting has lived and studied in the UK for several years also projected me (quoting another participant) as “educated” and generally respectful and responsible.

Churches in Nigeria seriously frown upon body marks such as piercings and tattoos. Specific clothes are also allocated to men and women, such that men are not allowed to wear clothes that are believed to be for women and vice versa. In this regard, I was humble in my approach and I also dressed modestly for every fieldwork meeting. I ensured that my attitude and mannerisms did not portray arrogance and ostentatiousness, two character attributes that are largely frowned upon in South-Eastern Nigeria, especially in church communities. More details of church members that took part in the one-to-one and focus group interviews are stated in the next section (Undertaking Fieldwork) and I will also discuss my positionality further in a later section of this chapter.

In all, eighteen one-to-one in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions involving a total of 18 participants were conducted for the second group. Participants for this group were drawn from three main church denominations: Catholics, Anglicans and Pentecostals, and were also individual members of the community. In order to maintain confidentiality, I ensured that participants from churches and families were not direct family relatives of any of the young mothers. Secondly, at no point was the outcome of interviews with young unmarried mothers discussed with church/community members during their own interviews. In terms of church membership, of those who took part in one-to-one interviews, eight (8) were members of the Catholic Church, six (6) were Pentecostals, while four (4) were members of the Anglican Church.

For the focus group interviews, five (5) members of the Catholic Church took part; while the Anglican Church focus group interview had four (4) participants. The first Pentecostal church focus group interview had five (5) participants present while the second had four (4). To check the influence of group participation and group dynamics, three of those who took part in the focus group discussions were also given one-to-one interviews on separate dates.

## **Undertaking Fieldwork**

One of the main challenges of this study was the geographical distance between prospective participants and myself. Being currently resident in the UK, it was imperative from the outset that the only way I could conduct credible interviews and hold focus group discussions was for me to take a single long trip or several trips to Nigeria. I made my first research trip to Nigeria in December 2014. Between December 2014 and January 2015, I made concerted efforts to identify possible participants by trying to locate unmarried mothers who were residing with their families. To facilitate this process of recruitment, I spoke with hospitals, churches, community centres, and antenatal clinics. I also opened communication channels with the management of several residential care homes for young unmarried mothers. Equipped with credible leads on potential participants, I returned to the UK and stayed in touch with my potential participants.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, my positionality and ability to ethically interview young unmarried mothers in Nigeria was always scrutinised and questioned at every opportunity, especially at conferences and similar events here in the UK. I reflected on these concerns raised by others, about a man conducting this sort of project. As a result of these concerns, on my return to Nigeria in March 2015, I started my fieldwork process with the recruitment and training of a female research assistant, who was to accompany me to interviews and recruitment meetings. My recruitment of a female research assistant was in anticipation of participants who may prefer to be interviewed by someone of the same sex, owing to the sensitive nature of my study. Thus her role was to conduct interviews with any young mother who chose not to be interviewed by me. Consequently, during all initial participant recruitment processes, potential participants were offered the option of being interviewed by a female, considering the sensitivities around the subject. It is important to stress that these concerns that were raised by others were unfounded as none of the participants (particularly young unmarried mothers) who took part in this study opted to be interviewed by my female research assistant. Some of the reasons given by participants for choosing to be interviewed by me (a male) over a female will be discussed further in another section of this chapter.

I commenced recruiting participants concurrently across both groups comprising of unmarried young mothers and church/community members. English is the official language of the research setting; however, participants were also informed that they could participate in the interview in their local language if they chose to. In any case, all interviews (one-to-one and focus groups) were conducted in English, except on two occasions where participants spoke in their native language (Igbo). This however did not pose any challenge as I speak the local language fluently and did not have any serious challenges translating the interviews to the English language. Whilst I speak both languages, translation always involves a level of interpretation which can be challenging. In the few instances

where participants said a word or a sentence in the local language, I stated what the literary translation is in English as well as how I interpreted it.

With regard to my first study group (unmarried young mothers), the twenty-five young unmarried women who took part in this study were located and interviewed either in their own home, or in a church-run care home where they reside. In most cases, I commenced my pre-interview proceedings with a visit to the participant. At this stage, (in some cases with the help of a gatekeeper) the potential participant was made aware of my intentions and the individual was also given the information sheet and the consent form. It is important to emphasise that no woman was obliged to participate. As mentioned earlier, the consent form and information sheet was signed by the gatekeeper as well as the participant. At this point, any individual who indicated interest in taking part was able to either decide to take part in the interview on that date or request another date and time. At this stage, the potential participant was made fully aware of my commitment to fighting for gender equality and all forms of discrimination against women. Making participants aware of my position is a crucial part of the process because as Janet Finch said, “a feminist sociologist of course will be on the side of women she studies” (Hammersley 1993, p.178). Thus, the need for potential participants to be made fully aware of my pro-feminist stance cannot be overemphasised, while ensuring I do not overpromising change.

Conducting one-to-one interviews on subjects that recount individuals' personal life and experiences such as those relating to sex, relationships, motherhood and so forth, carries a certain degree of sensitivity (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010; Ritchie and Lewis 2003; Rowley 2012). In a similar manner, there are also concerns of power dynamics in situations where a male is interviewing a female (Hammersley 1993; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). I kept all these concerns in mind and reflected on them throughout. For instance, during the initial process of recruiting participants, I made potential participants and gatekeepers aware of my pro-feminist stance. In consideration of power dynamics, I ensured that I did not arrive at any interview dressed in a manner that could be judged as well-off or intimidating. I had no visible tattoos or piercings which could be upsetting for some participants on socio-cultural and religious grounds. Throughout the fieldwork process, I maintained a simple dress code of shirt and trousers with no neck ties or suits. On the basis of my awareness of existing discourses surrounding young unmarried mothers in the research setting, I made it clear to every participant that I was on their side and as such, my intention was not to judge them or to cause them any upset. I gave them ownership of the interview process by stressing that they did not have to answer any questions, and that they could terminate the interview at any time. My exchange of pleasantries prior to any interview was completely informal and in the local language.

Rowley (2012) advised interviewers to avoid sharing any personal views during interviews by way of agreeing or disagreeing with the interviewee's narratives. This was largely difficult for most of my interviews with young unmarried mothers, especially as the majority of them shared experiences that I found deeply upsetting. I had interview sessions which left me in tears. On many occasions, I sat alone in the car for at least an hour, pondering over what I have just been told and shedding a few tears. Such interview sessions allowed me to question Rowley's (2012) view that a researcher should avoid agreeing or disagreeing with interviewees during interviews. I wondered how a vulnerable teenage woman could tell anyone (female or male) about how she became pregnant from sexual abuse and the individual could listen without showing emotions. While I tried not to be leading, I did respond; I showed emotions. On such difficult days, a phone call to or from my supervisors back in the UK was always my best way of picking myself up. Their words of encouragement kept me going.

As advised in Creswell (2007), I developed a level of rapport with participants, mainly to create room for trust and to endorse free communication between participants and myself. My pre-interview conversation with participants touched on everyday issues such as the constant rain, my journey to the interview, their favourite candidates in the ongoing elections, poor electricity supply, the high cost of fruit and my cooking skills. More importantly, this line of conversation allowed participants to relax and share some of their personal values and skills.

It is important to reiterate that the majority of participants (young unmarried mothers) who were residing in care homes were there to ensure that their unmarried pregnancy and motherhood status did not become public knowledge. While some came on their own, some were sent to the care homes by their parents or in some cases, by their church clergy. As I mentioned previously, at the first church-run care home for unmarried mothers that I approached, I was refused access by their gatekeeper. Her reasons were that the young women were in the care home to keep their status and circumstances private and away from anyone who might recognise them or know their family. She insisted that her job was to keep these young women "away from the world"; a world she believed I was a part of. This situation again calls to mind the concerns highlighted by Goffman (1963) about felt and enacted stigma, as a result of which people feel the need to dissociate themselves from a discrediting identity. This is also akin to the purity versus danger and sacred versus profane discourses, such that these women were constructed as profaners who would taint their communities. On this basis, a gatekeeper's reluctance to give access to these young women to me, or anyone else who might identify them and possibly disclose their location and circumstances is understandable. As a result, I relied largely on other gatekeepers, especially in the two care homes that I conducted most of my interviews to initiate a conversation about my study with these young women. With the help of gatekeepers, every potential participant was made aware that they were under no obligation to grant an interview. They were also reassured of my

commitment to ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity is maintained. While some were willing to speak to me personally to find out more about me and the study, and then subsequently take part in the interview, some declined to participate. Gatekeepers were also instrumental in gaining the trust of the young women, not just in terms of taking part in the interview but also their willingness to speak honestly about their experiences. The role of gatekeepers will be discussed further in another section of this chapter.

For the second group of participants, I focused my recruitment on three main Church denominations: the Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Pentecostals. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants were recruited at relevant community organisations, group events and churches. I introduced myself to the leadership of various churches and community groups who then introduced me to members. I informed them that I was conducting a study about the attitude of the church (clergy and laity) towards premarital sex, contraception, sex education, pregnancy, abortion, and unmarried motherhood/mothers. I also gave out post cards displaying my name, university, research interests and contact details. In all, I conducted eighteen one-to-one in-depth interviews with individuals from across the aforementioned church denominations (both clergy and laity) who were also individual members of the community. I also conducted four focus group interviews; one each with the Anglican and Catholic Church and two with two different Pentecostal churches. With this group, there were no significant issues with gatekeepers and all those who I approached to take part in the interview showed remarkable interest, except those who for time constraints and other personal commitments were unable to participate.

My focus group and one-to-one interviews with the Catholic Church involved two priests and a nun. It also involved leaders and members of the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWO) as well as leaders and members of the Catholic Men's Organisation (CMO). Interviews with the two Pentecostal churches involved four pastors, two women who are married to pastors, other women leaders, youth leaders and other members of the church. Participants from the Anglican Church included a vicar, two female youth leaders, two male youth leaders and other ordinary members of the church. The majority of these interviews were conducted in a quiet room within the church premises or at the individual's home.

All through the interviews with young unmarried mothers and church/community members, I remained mindful of the notion that participants are likely to innately perceive a power relationship between themselves and the researcher (Creswell 2007). As I stated earlier in this chapter, as many as twenty-one from the 25 participants were unemployed. For the few who were receiving some form of monthly income, they were getting the equivalent of forty-two British pounds monthly. Therefore, I was

conscious of the socio-economic differences that may exist between the majority of the participants and myself. Nonetheless, I was also aware of the three remedies Creswell (2007) proposed for researchers to tackle these power relationships and perceived inequality issues: First, by explaining how participation in qualitative research can provide participants with a voice and thus be empowering. To ensure this, during recruitment, I informed participants of the possible benefits of the study to the unmarried young mother as individuals, as well as to individual members of the community (especially young people), and to the entire country. For instance, I talked about my intention to hold seminars in churches and communities on the need for attitudinal change towards unmarried pregnancy following the outcome of my study. I also talked about my intention to publish executive reports that would inform relevant government agencies and other stakeholders on the plights of unmarried young mothers. Since nearing the end of this research project, I am currently pursuing these objectives as expressed to participants during fieldwork.

Second, developing a rapport with participants became one of my strongest strategies. From the preliminary recruitment process to the actual interviews, I maintained a strong cordial relationship with all stakeholders in my research project. I ensured no individual or group was made to feel less important. Third, I collaborated with participants. To ensure that participants were being carried along, I constantly asked for their assessment of my overall approach to the entire process. I encouraged them to give an honest critical appraisal of what went well and what could have been done differently. The outcome of some of these conversations with participants and gatekeepers will be discussed in greater details in another section of this chapter.

### **Data Collection Process and Ethical Considerations**

My position as the primary researcher in this study left me with the sole responsibility for all pre-and-post data collection logistics as well as the actual data collection. Before proceeding to collect data for this study, I sought and was granted permission/ethical approval by the Aston University Ethics Committee. I also sought and received the permission of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Development, Imo State South-Eastern Nigeria. Similarly, I requested and obtained the permission of the management of the two main residential care homes for young unmarried mothers, from where I recruited the majority of my participants. I also followed the same procedure with the four churches where I conducted most of my one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions.

I obtained appropriate consent forms from all participants and I made sure that each participant read and understood the information sheet. In the consent forms, I explained who I was and described the project and its objectives. I described what was expected of participants if they agree to participate in

my study. I then explained what would happen if the individual decided to take part/what would happen if anyone decided to withdraw at any point; the possible benefits and risks of taking part; issues of confidentiality and publication, as well as how Aston University and I could be contacted during and after the fieldwork. The information sheet also contained contact details of local government agencies and relevant non-governmental organisations that could be contacted by participants for post interview care and support (see appendices for mentioned documents). The consent form contained two signature columns: one for the participant and one for me. In each column, there was room for the individual to write their name, signature and date. I also had two separate forms for participants' biographic details; one form for unmarried young mothers, another for church/community members. Participants were asked to complete this form prior to the start of each interview.

Data for this study was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule. Where I perceived the response of a participant as insufficient or unclear, I probed further by asking for further clarification or asking a more direct question. There were also instances where the participant delves into a pertinent theme of interest that I did not include in the interview schedule (Guba and Lincoln 1981; Merriam 1998). In such scenarios, I allowed the participant to speak extensively on the theme.

There is a possibility that sensitive issues that may be raised during participants narratives could make participants become over communicative or uncommunicative (Rowley 2012). In consideration of this possibility, at the beginning of each interview, I informed participants of the time (one hour) allocated for the interview. In respect to interviews that might start and or finish late, I allocated a three hour window in my diary for each interview. The majority of the interviews lasted approximately one hour each. As stated earlier, I considered that participants may become emotional/upset or they may have other unforeseen engagements to urgently attend. In response to such eventualities, I made it absolutely clear to participants at the start of every interview that they could stop/withdraw from the interview; they could also suspend and reschedule the interview for a later time and date. Although no interviewee withdrew half-way through the interview, at least half of the twenty-five young unmarried mothers became emotional/upset during the interview. In such cases, I reiterated that they can withdraw, reschedule or take a break from the interview. None of the participants withdrew; they however took between 2-5 minutes break and continued with the interview.

For young unmarried mothers, I liaised with the relevant government agency, gatekeepers and onsite counsellors in the care homes for the provision of immediate counselling and support for participants who may require such provision. These services and personnel were not used by any participant. Two participants requested for their gatekeeper to be present at the interview. Although this was generally



for moral support, completion of the forms and interpretation if required; I reflected on the impact the presence of a gatekeeper could have on the participant. Prior to the start of every interview, I requested and received verbal and written consent from all participants for the interview to be recorded electronically. Thus, all interviews were recorded with a dictaphone recorder. I also made hand written notes of body language and other non-verbal communications that took place during the interview. Thank you goodie bags containing toiletries were provided for every young unmarried mother who participated in the interview as well as their gatekeepers. To thank church/community members for taking part, they were also offered the equivalent of 350 minutes of mobile phone recharge airtime. Some participants (Church/community members) did not accept this. For the purpose of attending the interview, there were no transport costs to any of the participants. I made it a point of duty to travel to the chosen location of all participants. This however was helped by the fact that the majority of participants were either in the same location or located not too far from each other. All one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions followed the ethical routes as approved by the British Sociological Association code of ethics and the laws on data protection both in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. The original names of participants as well as other identifiable features that would make for easy identification of participants were also changed and replaced with pseudonyms (see appendix A for participants' pseudonyms and other details).

### **Positionality and Reflexivity: Notes of a Male Researcher Interviewing Unmarried Young Women in a Patriarchal Society**

As mentioned in Chapter One, men's relationship with feminism is fraught with several difficulties (Heath 1987; Hearn 1992; Jardine and Smith 1987). In the words of Digby (1998, p. 2), "scepticism about feminist men also derives from the fact that most men are socialised into identities that are hostile to feminism". By being a male born and raised in a patriarchal society where feminism is essentially suppressed, Digby's comment about "feminist men" largely captures my given socialisation and identity. Digby (1998, p. 2) further argued that "given all the advantages of being a man in a society where men dominate politics, business, education, law, religion, and most other areas of life, a man who says he is a feminist is perplexing". Again, these "advantages of being a man" are evident in Nigerian society which happens to be not only my place of birth and upbringing but also where this study was conducted. Thus I am well aware of the perplexities surrounding my pro-feminist views. Nonetheless, I am in agreement with the notion that feminism is not only a subject for women; it is also a subject for men, particularly because what it is about obviously concerns them; thus men have to learn to make it their affair, to carry it through into their lives (Heath 1987; Jardine and Smith 1987). As was the case with Kimmel (1998), I am also aware that I will remain constantly confronted with questions about my positionality, especially in relation to whether men can/should do feminism and what happens when men are feminists? Some feminists, as I have witnessed in the past, would outright tell me that they cannot be convinced by my pro-feminist stance. In a religious and socio-cultural

setting such as Nigeria, where patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity is ubiquitous, I will always have men who would consider me and my beliefs as odd and anti-men. In any case, I have not and will not be deterred from upholding my feminist stance.

I conducted my fieldwork in South-Eastern Nigeria where power structures allocate a lot of authority to men; and where normative discourse on female sexuality largely emphasises the control of women. There is also a cultural silence in relation to discussing issues of sex and sexuality, especially when it involves young women. In situations where a male interviews a female as was the case in my fieldwork, there are huge concerns about power dynamics. Therefore, by positioning myself on the opposing side of this discourse, it was clear that my use of feminism as a guide to responses and conduct within the field would be required. Against this backdrop, I attempted to showcase the characteristics of my commitment to feminism and my positionality as a pro-feminist male researcher throughout my fieldwork period. Armed with my notes from my fieldwork diary and commentaries of some young unmarried mothers and gatekeepers, I commence this reflective account by looking at some of the reasons why young unmarried mothers granted me an interview.

### **Why Young Unmarried Mothers spoke to me**

A culmination of issues contributed to the reasons why unmarried young mothers spoke to me about their experiences of unmarried early pregnancy and motherhood. Some of these issues are primarily linked to my practical positionality as commentaries by some mothers and their gatekeepers suggested. However, bearing in mind questions on how to incorporate the voices of others without colonising them in a manner that reinforces patterns of domination (England 1994), some reasons may well be perceived as linked to power imbalances. In any case, going by the commentaries of mothers and some gatekeepers, I have categorised the reasons why unmarried young mothers spoke to me into three: Insider/Outsider Cultural and Geographical Distance (Pro-feminism); Consent Form & Information Sheet and Gatekeepers' Influence.

#### *Insider/Outsider Cultural and Geographical Distance (Pro-Feminism)*

I consider cultural and geographical distance in terms of the insider/outsider phenomenon as one of the reasons why participants (young mothers) spoke to me. To facilitate this, I started with the account of unmarried young mothers themselves. One of the things I banked on in terms of making this research project a success was my insider status, based on the fact that I was born and raised in in a Christian family in the research setting and could speak the local language (Igbo) fluently. However, I remained aware that this does not erode the difficulties and risks associated with reflexivity, positionality and

language in qualitative researches, especially those on such a sensitive topic (Dickson-Swift et al. 2008; Temple and Edwards 2002). These concerns became more pronounced in my mind, knowing I could easily be perceived as arrogant and insensitive, being a male who lives in the UK (my outsider status). To these concerns, my response before, during and after my fieldwork remained my pro-feminism commitment and my early knowledge of the challenges young women face in Nigeria when they become pregnant outside marriage. I resolved to remain humble and accept that people will form opinions of my positionality that may not align with my views of myself. However, one would agree that it is not unusual that men are explicitly pro-gender equality and /or consider themselves to be feminists (Holmgren 2002). In light of this, it was not a surprise to find I was apprehensive. On the other hand, commentaries of some of the mothers and some gatekeepers on why the mothers granted me interview were reassuring. In the words of seventeen years old Princess:

*“Knowing that you are not from this culture made it easier; it’s just psychological”. Being an outsider, you won’t judge me, you are very educated and exposed (...) you don’t even know me or where I am from”* (Princess, current age 17).

Not only did Princess highlight my outsider status and pro-feminist views, she echoed the cultural and geographical distance between herself and me. Although being a man could potentially be off-putting, other elements of my identity enable access. The complexities of insider/outsider dynamics is captured further in Vera’s commentary as she elaborately recounts:

*“It was a bit easy because the girls feel you understand more. Finding myself in that situation I will feel freer to talk to a man than nurse or sister in charge; (...) reason is because I feel I won’t get judged by him being an outsider and the person he is. You created a very comfortable environment, you seem very educated and enlightened, you seem to have seen so many cases and learnt not to judge us”* (Vera, current age 19).

The interesting thing about Vera’s case is that although the gatekeeper had spoken to her and other young women about my research project some days before I came to meet them, she still came to the gatekeeper’s office to meet me to ask her own questions. She wanted to know who I was, what part of the state I was from, where I lived, and also requested to see my identity card. After I explained who I was and reiterated that the interview was completely voluntary, Vera not only granted me an interview, she also gave the above commentary as part of the reasons why she agreed to be interviewed. 17 year old Chika had a slightly different reason, much of which still bordered on my positionality. On why she spoke to me about her experience of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood she said:

*“I just want to do something with my life, I want to continue my education, I believe maybe you can help me; you are different, you understand”* (Chika, current age 17).

From the time of my interview with Chika, I have continued to ponder over how best to respond to her belief that I could help her. Part of Chika’s response relates to my positionality and to the cultural

distance between us. Her narrative touched on the dilemma of many researchers about whether the outcome of a research project will meet certain expectations of participants. Virtually every researcher works hard to ensure the publication of the outcome of his or her study in a renowned journal. The issue is that these journals are mainly read by other researchers who use them to write and publish yet another paper. The extent to which these publications benefit those (such as Chika) who primarily participated in providing the data remains a question yet to be answered. In my case, and as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I hope that I could do more than publishing papers in journals that may only be read by an elite minority.

In the same vein, commentaries of some gatekeepers further emphasised the place of insider/outsider cultural and geographical distance as a reason behind participants' willingness to grant an interview. According to Mathah:

*“Of course, these girls [Unmarried young mothers] who find themselves in these situations have the tendency of not trusting men anymore because of what they believe them [men] to be and all. So if it was to be a male researcher from this part of the world [Nigeria], I think it would have been different; but since they know you came from the UK, I think that also made it easier for them to relate with you with the belief that you are different”* (Mathah, Nurse and gatekeeper).

Nurse Mathah's commentary is also in line with the views of the young mothers. Her views largely summaries not only insider/outsider cultural and geographical distance but also stresses the extent of the gender discrimination challenges faced by women.

A key advantage I experienced in this study is that I am conversant with the cultures and traditions of the research setting as I was born and raised in the State and speak the local dialect. This made it easy for me to adhere not only to the laws on data protection in Nigeria but also to the customs and traditions of the host communities. I was also conscious of the fact that the identities of both researcher and participants impact on the research process (Bourke 2014). Thus, I made my position clear to the participants from the start. Identities are said to come into play through our perception of others and the ways in which we expect others to perceive us (Bourke 2014). To this effect, I was aware that I was interviewing unmarried teenage mothers to whom, in the first instance, I may come across as just another “Igbo man” [man from a local South-Eastern Nigerian community] who is predisposed to gender discrimination and the perpetuation patriarchal norms of society. As Bourke puts it, “through recognition of our own biases, we presume to gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants” (Bourke 2014, p. 1). Against this backdrop, a practical expression of positionality is vital. In this case,

participants became fully aware of my dedication to the fight for gender equality and all forms of discrimination against women. Even so, England (1994) further warns us of the dangers of appropriating the voice of others in our rush to be more inclusive and conceptualise difference and diversity.

### *Consent Form and Information Sheet*

Seeking and giving consent is neither balanced nor popular in the day-to-day dealings between men and women in several developing societies with patriarchal cultures. Cultural and religious norms in Nigeria require that women submit to the wishes and demands of the men in their life even when such submission is against the wishes of the woman (Cornwall 2002). I admit underestimating the extent to which seeking the consent of the young women that took part in this research project verbally and in writing, could influence their decision to take part in the study. Commentaries of some gatekeepers painted a vivid picture of the importance of seeking proper consent, especially for a male researcher intending to interview young women in a developing society with patriarchal cultures. In the words of Mathah:

*“The consent form makes them feel they still have that choice to make either to talk or not. It makes you feel safe and when you feel safe you can say anything. Consent form coming from a man in this part of the world (...) will make any young girl feel respected that her opinion really counts”* (Mathah, Nurse and gatekeeper).

Adding to the strong and vital views of Mathah on the role and importance of the consent form was the response from Chino. She said:

*“Speaking freely was 50/50. The consent form helped because I got an informed consent by speaking to them [the unmarried young mothers] for 3-4 days about what you are coming to do”* (Chino, Paediatric Nurse and gatekeeper).

Chino’s commentary significantly underscores the importance of seeking participants’ informed consent at the right time/place and through the right channel. Her narrative highlights the importance of ensuring that a potential participant does not feel invaded and/or undermined.

### *Gatekeepers’ Influence*

The third and last category of the reasons why participants granted me interview is the influence of gatekeepers. Here, I look at the responses of some gatekeepers on the central question of why participants granted me interviews. Gatekeepers play a vital role in contributing to the success or failure of a research project. I did not specifically ask the gatekeepers I worked with in this study if they

thought they were part of the reasons why the young mothers spoke to me. Their importance in the entire process played out in their responses to question about the reasons why the mothers agreed to be interviewed. Chino puts it simply:

*“I was like John the Baptist, I opened the door; they trust and believe me, so they trusted you too”*  
(Chino, Paediatric Nurse and gatekeeper).

Following nurse Chino, Celina (Catholic nun) further highlighted the forerunner role of gatekeepers as she explained:

*“Some days before you started the interview, I had a meeting with all of them. I told them who you are and what you are trying to do and why you are doing it, so I told them to be honest”* (Celina, Catholic Nun, Care home Manager and gatekeeper).

I further asked Celina why she thought having a meeting with the young women prior to my coming to interview them was important. Her response was that they do not want people to know they are pregnant, that in fact maintaining privacy is the reason they came to the care home. This further explained why another care home did not allow me access to the young women; citing that they would not want to speak to anybody from “outside” not even people from their family or the government. More importantly, this gives credence to the vital role of gatekeepers towards the success or failure of the research process.

Whilst showing appreciation for the positive role of gatekeepers in ensuring the success of this research project, it is equally important to reflect on the negative potentials of gatekeepers. For instance, gatekeepers may hand-pick participants who they believe would be outspoken. Secondly and as previously mentioned, the presence of a gatekeeper during interview may influence the response of a participant. It is unlikely that a participant will criticise the home where she is living, with those in-charge of the home present. In any case, I did not observe any significant difference in the narratives of the two participants who were interviewed with a gatekeeper present when compared with those who were interviewed alone.

## **Analysis**

Following the completion of the data collection process, collected data from this study was analysed thematically. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its flexibility and ability to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Another reason why I chose thematic analysis is because of its ability to report experiences, meanings and the reality of participants (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis can also be a constructionist method, which

examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are affected by a range of discourses operating within society (Braun and Clarke 2006). These qualities of thematic analysis informed my decision to analyse data from this study thematically. Following my decision to analyse collected data using this tool, I also decided to manually code the data. I followed the six phases of conducting a thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). My explanations of the six phases are in the paragraphs below.

For the first phase, I familiarised myself with the depth and breadth of the content of the data through repeated reading whilst searching for meanings, taking notes and marking ideas for coding (Braun and Clarke 2006). At the end of each interview day, I made extra notes of key points that I was unable to record during the interview. To ensure I familiarised with and immersed myself further in the data, I commenced the transcription of the audio files from the day's interview(s). Transcribing the interviews was also another reminder of the difficult experiences of some of my participants. Again, I relied on the support and advice of my supervisors to deal with this.

I started phases two and three with generating initial codes (both semantic content and latent) and the searching for themes respectively (Braun and Clarke 2006). The production of initial codes from the data was important to my data analysis process because codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst, and they also refer to the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data (Braun and Clarke 2006). When I commenced the creation of this web of themes and sub-themes (codes), what informed what I was looking for came from my research objectives and research questions. However, in the course of pulling out these themes from the data corpus, there were also recurrent patterns that were neither considered in the research questions/objectives nor in the interview schedule.

In phases four and five, I reviewed and defined/named the themes respectively (Braun and Clarke 2006). I started phase four by devising and refining a set of what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 20) referred to as "candidate themes", (themes that may not have enough data to support them, or those for which the related data are too diverse). At this stage, I collapsed some themes into each other to form one theme and also broke some other themes down into separate themes. This was followed by (phase 5) refinement and definition of the emerging themes that I then analysed. By defining and refining these themes, I identified their significance to the study and the various aspects of the data captured by these themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). I considered emerging themes such as sex education, churches, schools, families, poverty, rape, parental upbringing, sanctions, shaming, love/relationship, acceptance/denial, relocation, early marriage, pregnancy and abortion. I identified the stories behind

each of these themes and wrote a detailed analysis of each of them, while taking into account their position in my research objectives.

For the sixth and final phase, I followed the precepts of my earlier discussed epistemological positioning and started to write about the implications of these themes in relation to unmarried pregnancy and motherhood in South-Eastern Nigeria. I started to identify prevailing discourses in the research setting that are linked to the themes, especially those linked to issues of power, language, identity and knowledge (see Burr 1995, 2015; Fairclough 2015; Foucault 1976). Throughout the process of data analysis, I stayed conscious of what Burr (1995) saw as the ability of a multitude of discourses to construct and produce an individual's identity. As hinted in Chapter One, a discourse here "refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light" (Burr 2015, p. 75). As Fairclough (2010) noted, discourse is used by both social theorists and analysts because it looks at language use as a social practice which allows it to be conceptualised as a socially and historically situated mode of action, such that, it is not only socially shaped, but it is also socially constitutive.

In line with Burr (2015), I identified these discourses to make visible how certain representations of events or persons are being achieved in various socio-cultural settings. In doing so, I reflected on the embodied effects of discourses, narratives and subjectivities. For instance, Krieken (2017) stressed that narrative discourse is characterized by the representation of viewpoints such that the objects, events, and situations in a story can be narrated from the viewpoint of the narrator, the viewpoint of a character, or the viewpoints of multiple characters. As demonstrated in the previous chapters of this thesis, it is important to reiterate here that the identification of themes and discourses in relation to data analysis is ingrained in poststructuralist pro-feminist precepts. I'm aware that "the same words, phrases, pictures, expressions and so on might appear in a number of different discourses, each time contributing to a rather different narrative" (Burr 2015, p. 78). Thus this process of data analysis would not be exempted from accusations of some form of epistemological bias. This reinforces the thoughts of Braun and Clarke (2006) who stressed that as thematic analysis is widely used, there is no clear agreement about what it is and how you go about doing it.



## **Chapter Summary**

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the central focus of this study is to investigate the range of attitudes of family and church members towards unmarried teenage pregnancy as well as the experiences of young unmarried mothers. This chapter considered why, how and what has been done to achieve this aim. This chapter looked at the reasons behind my decision to conduct this research. It looked at the ethical challenges which were faced in the course of conducting this study. In this chapter, I also expressed my convictions and ideals as a pro-feminist researcher. It also looked at epistemological aspects of the study in terms of areas such as the research methods, tools and techniques that I employed in conducting this study. As well as highlighting the various research approaches and tools used for this study, this chapter was also able to provide justification for the choice of such tools and approaches. The groups targeted in this study and the rigors of access negotiation have also been discussed in this chapter.

Overall, the notion that the process of and route to conducting a piece of research is neither straight nor devoid of challenges has been underscored here. This chapter highlighted the importance of a researcher's positionality, particularly on the basis of having conducted this research in Owerri, Imo State, South-East Nigeria which happens to be a pronounced patriarchal society. It has looked at issues of power relations and gender discrimination and how they may be encountered by feminist researchers in societies such as those found in the research setting. The glaring challenges faced by numerous researchers have also been articulated here, especially males whose research may demand that they discuss sexual issues with young women, in societies where there is huge cultural silence around the language for holding such discussions. The high degree of sensitivity around such discussions as those pertaining to sexual activity, contraception, sex education, abortion, and unmarried pregnancy has also been touched. I have also looked at the process of data analysis, especially in terms of justifying the use of thematic analysis in a qualitative poststructuralist feminist study. This chapter has not eliminated concerns of power relations that concern many researchers; it has however held that it is possible to ethically conduct research projects in cases where such concerns exist between the researcher and the researched. This chapter helped in positioning this study on the side of other studies that argue that male researchers can consider themselves feminist/pro-gender, equality so long as their commitment to feminism remains strong.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SEX, SEX EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE, ACCESS AND USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES AND ABORTION PRACTICE AMONG YOUNG UNMARRIED WOMEN IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA**

#### **Introduction**

As stated in the preceding chapters, this study is conducted in line with poststructuralist feminist perspectives. The aim here is to situate this study and the empirical findings within an analytical and theoretical framework, especially those highlighted in chapters One and Two. One crucial goal of these discussion chapters (4-6) is to analyse the findings (themes) of this study and the identification of the prevailing discourses that are in operation in my research setting. To this effect, I have identified discourses such as heteronormativity and binary opposites all of which I have located and embedded within the existing literature and discourses in the fields of religion, sexuality, gender, and power relations. Therefore, in accordance with the aforementioned theoretical framework of this research project, the aim of this chapter is to examine unmarried young mothers' knowledge, access to and use of contraceptives and abortion practice. It will explore the sexual experiences of young unmarried mothers as well as the general context of sex and sexuality education of young women in South-Eastern Nigeria with regard to young women's knowledge and access to pregnancy prevention and abortion practice. It will look at some of the reasons behind the declining age of sexual debut of young people, particularly young unmarried women. In line with narratives from participants in this study, this chapter will look at various factors such as: poverty, parental upbringing, influence of the media, peer group influence among others that were identified as factors that contribute to the occurrences of unmarried teenage pregnancy. This chapter will also look at the circumstances around the sexual activities of young women (consensual and non-consensual) and the overall nature of the relationships these young women had with the men who fathered their children. The reasons why a young unmarried woman's sexual encounter is likely to result in unmarried pregnancy and motherhood will also be highlighted here.

Specific sections of this chapter will look at key themes from my study findings, such as young women's sexual activities, friendship/love, sexual consent, sexual coercion (rape), sex education, contraception and abortion. These themes will be integrated into relevant dominant discourses in operation in the study setting. To this end, discourses around repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity and romantic love, as well as assumptions about male sexual drive will be discussed within the themes mentioned above. This integration will provide a better understanding of the general attitudes of my study setting on issues of premarital sex and premarital pregnancy. This chapter will also argue that rather than the decreasing age of sexual debut, low level of sex education and lack of access to contraceptives are the major causes of unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

Attention will be paid to the quality of sex education (if any) provided to young unmarried women by agents of socialisation such as: the family, churches and schools. The voices of unmarried young mothers recounting their experiences will lead the discussions in this chapter. Attention will also be paid to the views and reactions of individual members of churches (laity and clergy) and members of various communities drawn from Owerri, Imo State, South-East Nigeria.

### **Sexual Activity among Young Unmarried Women**

As highlighted in the literature review chapter, studies in developing countries have shown that many young unmarried women in their teens engage in sexual activity; Nigeria is among the top ten countries in Africa with the highest rates (Woog et al. 2015). In South-East Nigeria, data from previous studies such as Izugbara (2004a) records 13.5 as the average age of sexual debut and also records that 55% of females who took part in that study admitted to having sex before the age of twenty. With regards to sexual activity, my focus is not simply to investigate whether young people become sexual active in their teenage age or what the average age of sexual debut is for young people. In this study, I set out to examine the reasons why young people, particularly young unmarried women do or do not have sex in their teenage age. I have illustrated some of the reasons as given by participants in their narratives in the paragraphs below.

From the findings of this study, the average age of sexual debut among the participants was 15.5. This is in line with studies such as Bankole and Malarcher (2010); Izugbara (2004a) and Okonofua et al. (2009) that the majority of young people, particularly young unmarried women in developing societies make their sexual debut in their teens. All twenty-five young unmarried women who took part in this study had at least one sexual encounter before turning eighteen. Participants (both unmarried young mothers and individual members of churches and community) cited factors such as friendship/love, rape, lack of parental love and care, marriage promises and poverty (influence of money/material gifts) as some of the reasons behind the increase in the number of young women embarking on early sexual activity. Although various reasons were identified as driving factors for early sexual initiation by unmarried young women, the majority of these reasons point to failings of individuals (significant others) and agents of socialisation that these young women relied on for care, guidance and protection.

### **Friendship and Love**

Friendship and love was one prominent theme that underscored the reasons why the young women that took part in this study were involved in sexual activity. Twenty of the twenty-five young unmarried women that took part in this study confirmed that the relationship that resulted in their pregnancy was

borne out of love, affection and trust; there was a form of boyfriend/girlfriend relationship which existed between them and the men who fathered their children. For many young unmarried women in Nigeria, this study found that their decisions to have sex was not due to any form of pressure asserted, as it was typically based on liking and trust. For instance, Amaka was asked about the nature of her relationship with men prior to her becoming pregnant and the nature of her relationship with the man she conceived with. Her response highlights the innocence and open-minded nature of many teenage women. In her words:

*I happen to be a shy type so I really don't have that much opportunity ... I wasn't opportune to have any relationship with men till when I met him. He acted like a good person as well ... He happens to be the first person and that was the first day too. No, he actually didn't force me. He talked me into it ..., secondly, I was in love with him (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

It can be argued that Amaka's relationship may have been exploitative since she attested to being talked into having sex, even more so because the man in question disappeared as soon as Amaka informed him of her pregnancy. However, it is equally evident that Amaka went into the relationship and consequently had sex because she "was in love with" the father of her child. Similarly, Becky, another participant further stressed the point that the majority of teenage women (from my study) who go into sexual relationships are not influenced by money, but they do so, on the grounds of love and affection. According to her:

*I wasn't offered money because he didn't have money, so it wasn't a financial thing, it was more like I liked him and he said he liked me too (Becky, 24, Pregnant at 16).*

Becky did not fail to highlight that she went into a sexual relationship with the father of her child because they were both teenagers who not only grew up in the same neighbourhood but who also liked each other and developed a romantic alliance. Just like Amaka and Becky, several other young unmarried women who took part in this study, such as Sandra, maintained that their sexual relationship was based on liking, friendship and love.

Among the young women who attested to being in relationships, there is a fraction of those who developed relationships with men in their search for love, care and affection which they lacked at home from parents or guardians and their siblings. This was typical of Monica's situation. Recounting her ordeal, she noted that she was not pressurized to have sex:

*I wasn't pressured [to have sex]. I didn't find love at home. I needed love; I needed care and affection, nobody was showing me love. It was just like a military zone, you know, nobody cares; so I wanted someone that will show me love, someone that will show me care, someone that will show me that he really cares about me, call me on phone, check up on me and all that*

*(...) I just wanted to be happy with my life. So, I wasn't pressured into having sex with this guy; no I wasn't* (Monica, 23, Pregnant at 18).

Monica's narrative echoes the impact of lack of parental care and family instability on the growth and development of young unmarried women in Nigeria. She painted a picture of her family as a place where she "didn't find love" and a place where "nobody cares".

Contrary to the narrative of the unmarried mothers, some individual members of churches and communities (which will be discussed below) voiced the opinion that money and material gifts are part of the reasons why young unmarried women become sexually active. The narratives of young unmarried women who took part in this study question these assumptions. In fact, the cultural silence and taboo surrounding matters relating to sex in Nigeria (Izugbara 2008) plays a crucial role in these erroneous assumptions as well as in young women's understanding or lack of understanding of the meaning of romantic love. Foucault (1976) also talked about society's imposition of a general and studied silence on discussions and issues pertaining to sex. This imposed silence is, to a large extent complicit in the issues surrounding young women's understanding of romantic love and the problems they encounter as a result of their notion of love.

In exploring the overall nature of young women's sexual relationships, their narratives enhance the ongoing argument about how romantic love should be defined. For instance, Karandashev (2015, p.3) defined romantic love as "a universal emotion experienced by a majority of people, in various historical eras, and in all the world's cultures, but manifests itself in different ways because culture has been found to have an impact on people's conceptions of love and the way they feel, think, and behave in romantic relationships". Karandashev's view on the influence of culture on people's conception of love is a vital point. From the narratives of young women, it is evident that the position of culture, historical eras and the ability of love to manifest itself in different ways (Karandashev 2015) impacts people's understanding of romantic love. This is the influence of culture on the definition of love as proffered by Karandashev (2015). Another vital point however is that such cultural influence emanates from dominant discourses that pass them down to less powerful members of the society. Also, Karandashev's notion of love, as not just a mere Western cultural construct is countered and contested on the grounds that the verbalisation of feelings has an impact on how we sociologically understand them (Evans 2001). The understanding and verbalisation of feelings of love by young unmarried women who took part in this study are not framed by these young women. Young people, especially young women are born into these discourses and they are not given the option and opportunity to negotiate for alternatives. Key evidence of the challenges of navigating this dilemma is found in the interplay between the demand for early marriage/virginity and sexual participation of young unmarried women, all of which will be discussed further in this chapter.

## “Forced Sex” and Rape

Rape is another prominent theme that emanated from my interviews with young unmarried women. One key question that springs to mind regarding the issue of sexual activity of the young unmarried women who took part in this study is about how these young women conceptualise rape. It is important to note at this juncture that these young women did not conceptualise rape in the same way that I would. While narrating their sexual encounter with their partner, virtually all the participants whose narratives suggest to me that they have been raped by their partner used “forced sex” as their language of description, not rape. Thus, forced sex (rape) was identified in this study as one of the causes of unmarried teenage pregnancy. In order to represent their position, I adopt the terms forced sex/rape as they narrated them – whilst also recognising that forced sex is rape throughout this thesis. I also argue that the existing repressive discourse around the understanding of rape is largely responsible for the way young women conceptualised rape. Society ensures the repression and control of the voices of its weak individuals and social groups by those in control of social and economic power (Foucault 1976). Sexual repressive discourses leave power and the control of the language of sexual negotiation in the hands of powerful individuals and social groups (Foucault 1976). Narratives of some participants below will further buttress these points.

Four women recounted their experiences of being raped. While three could recall being violently raped, one was unable to recall the rape incident as she was drugged before being raped. Stacey, one of the young women recounted her experiences of rape:

*I said no (...) ‘please let me go, (...) I have to go’. He said no (...) so both of us started dragging, he now pushed me inside his room, so when he pushed me inside his room, I was on his bed, so I managed to stand up then because as he pushed me he just relaxed, (...) so I saw it as the opportunity for me to run out, immediately I stood up to run out he dragged me on my hair. He dragged me back and suppressed me down and that was how he raped me; and that was (...) during my ovulation time, so he now raped me then and there and released on my body (Stacey, current age 18).*

Stacey stressed that her traumatic experience was made worse by several factors which includes the fact that she is a “good Christian” with the intentions of remaining a virgin until marriage and the fact that the man who raped her was [REDACTED] she looked up to as a role model. Similarly, Ebere narrated how she was ambushed by four men on a lonely walk way on her way to her godmother’s house. She said:

*On my way to [my godmother’s] house I saw some men around that road, (...) They were up to four, they raped me, they carried me to one house, uncompleted building (...) locked the door. That is the reason why I got pregnant, they impregnated me (Ebere, current age 18).*

Just like the other victims of rape that took part in this study, Ebere's experience resulted in her unmarried pregnancy and motherhood.

The second pattern of sexual abuse recounted by one participant was a situation where she was made to become unaware of her environment through her consumption of food that contained a sedative substance. Chika, who recounted her shock at finding out she was pregnant as she had no clear knowledge of embarking on a sexual act, said:

*I didn't even remember having sexual intercourse with a man (...). He gave me something to eat, (...) so I don't know if it's through what he gave me that I ate. I can't explain. He drugged me and I slept off"* (Chika, current age 18).

Chika did not consciously engage in sexual intercourse with the father of her baby, she found it difficult recalling her engagement in any sexual act when she tested positive to pregnancy. She believed that her food was drugged and she was raped while she was under the influence of the drug that was passed into her food. None of the rape cases found in this study were reported to the police. In Nigeria, the construction of rape is such that victims are shamed, labelled and victimised; thus, such individuals are compelled to keep mute about their traumatic experience.

While they did not describe the men as rapists, narratives of some young women "in love" and in sexual relationships also pointed to a pattern of sexual encounters facilitated by verbal persuasion by the men involved. For instance, Carol voiced how her desire to remain a virgin until marriage was shattered by her boyfriend's persistence to talk her into allowing him to have sex with her. In her words:

*It's the guy that [took my virginity] he wanted to (...) have sex with me, but I said no, that I'm still a virgin, that I will still be a virgin till I get married but he insisted (...) he was telling me many things like he loves me, that even though I got pregnant that he will marry me; all those things; so (...) because I love him, I now gave him myself* (Carol, current age 17).

Similarly, some other participants such as Amaka and Grace were coerced into losing their virginity and consequently became pregnant due to their partners' use of forceful language and behaviours which amounted to relentless persuasion. According to Grace:

*When I went [to his house] he didn't actually tell me that I was going to have sex with him, so he forced me and he said that I will not get pregnant. Because of all the things he bought for me so he now slept with me* (Grace, current age 16).

Although Grace mentioned being “forced” to have sex by her partner, when questioned further she did not consider this rape. Findings from this study points to a lack of understanding of the meaning of rape among young unmarried mothers. From the twenty-one young unmarried mothers who admitted being in a love relationship prior to their pregnancy, at least four used words and sentences that would suggest that the sexual encounter that brought about their pregnancy was not completely consensual. Commentaries from these young unmarried mothers denote that the behaviour(s) and language(s) of negotiation used by their male partner were largely forceful and coercive respectively. Nonetheless, none of these participants accused their male partners of rape. This again raises some fundamental questions: why did Grace and other young women who had similar experiences not want to describe their experience as rape? How does one frame one’s experiences? What factors influence these framings? Whilst these questions are beyond the remit of this study, in the paragraphs below, I have attempted to examine this further.

The various experiences of rape of these participants again point to the understandings of rape in Nigeria. Discourses around how rape is understood and male sexual drive construct male sexuality as driven by a biological imperative and also embodies women as potential triggers which can set it in motion (Burr 1995). I argue that with the protection of the assumptions of male sexual drive and their control of power, men are acquitted of rape, even by their vulnerable female victims. As highlighted above, participants whose narratives clearly signified that they were victims of rape at the hands of their partner, were unable to describe their sexual experience as rape. Similar to my findings, Tolman (2005) found that young women hold themselves responsible for what occurs in heterosexual relationships. For instance, none of the young women interviewed in this study reported the fact to their parents or the authorities at the time. As Foucault (1976) noted, dominant discourses decide what is allowed to be said and what is unsayable. These young women blame themselves and make excuses for the male. They also voice concerns about the consequences of their desire for their relationship with their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends, and other adults in their lives.

In light of the above, questions about how individuals frame their own experiences and the factors that influence these framings become even more crucial. As Fairclough (2015) puts it, language and power elucidate how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society. This again does not only highlight the lack of sex education of young women in Nigeria, but also underscores the untold degree of male domination and unfavourable power relations. The culture of the Nigerian people is said to allocate disproportionate authority to men over women; hence they (men) exert control over women’s bodies and their general sexual choices and behaviours (Izugbara 2008). This culture of control of the female body and sexuality explains why none of the four women from this study who acknowledged their rape got justice. Not one of the perpetrators was ever arrested,



charged or punished for their crimes. The norm in such instances is that the woman (the victim) becomes the villain.

This study found that the understanding of rape in developing societies is embodied by power relations. In societies such as where this study was conducted, the meaning of rape is coined by the dominant social group with its own interests in mind. The definition of rape is clad with ambiguity which makes it difficult for female and vulnerable members of such societies to understand. For instance, several participants in this study who voiced that their partner talked and coerced them into having sex did not consider this as rape. To this end, Yip and Page (2013) looked at the extent to which love ameliorates sex, wherein the language of love enables one to make some actions right. While I view cases such as those narrated by some young women as rape, many participants who had such experiences did not and may never see such sexual activity as rape. Again, this underscores the lopsided nature of the understanding of rape and other discourses which would result in contrary narratives between unmarried young mothers and other individual members of the society, on many of the issues raised in this study, such as sexual activity and rape.

### **Hope and Promise of Marriage**

Hope and promise of marriage emerged as one of the major reasons why young unmarried women embark on sexual activity. Prevailing understanding of sexual activity and marriage in Nigeria demands that sex should not happen when those involved are not married. Marriage is considered a thing of honour in Nigeria and getting married as a virgin is held in high esteem (Amobi and Igwegbe 2004). When society adjudges a woman as “too old for marriage” the woman is labelled and stigmatised (Agunbiade et al. 2009, Cornwall 2002). As a result of such societal pressure, young women are compelled to sacrifice the “honour” of keeping their virginity for the option of having sex and getting married to their sexual partners in the long run. On the one hand, the legal age of marriage in Nigeria as set by the Child Rights Act is 18; on the other hand, socio-cultural and religious norms and values pressure young women into embracing desires of marriage in their early teens, thus they tend to develop “serious” heterosexual relationships early on in life.

Several participants in this study reported that their sexual initiation, experience and eventual pregnancy were as a result of the marriage proposals they received from the men that fathered their children. They initiated sex with them with the trust and hope that the men would marry them even if they got pregnant in the course of the relationship. Speaking about her relationship, one participant said:

*We have just been friends, at the end we can stay together as husband and wife* (Katie, current age 19).

Similarly, another participant voiced how she started a relationship with the father of her baby. She said:

*He convinced me to be my fiancé so I accepted him* (Vera, current age 19)

Elaborating further, another young woman reporting how her relationship started said:

*He used to ask me to marry him every day (...) so that is why I decided to marry him* (Onyi, current age 19).

Evidence from this study suggests that the majority of young women in South-Eastern Nigeria do not just decide to embark on sexual activity; it is often linked to marital promises from the men they are involved with. However, despite the promise of marriage, my research findings showed that the men eventually left the young women when pregnancy occurred and the promise of marriage was refuted. Talking about this, one participant said:

*The boy is not ready for marriage for now, he even told me that if I know whatever I want to do [about the pregnancy] I should do. So that's why I forgot about the boy* (Agnes, current age 19).

As a result of this denial, pregnant young women such as Agnes are left to face their pregnancy alone. To this end, Essien and Bassey (2012) opined that for many men, all relationships with women are about sexual conquest with little responsibility in mind. Compared to the situation highlighted by Fidolini (2014) about young Moroccans, it is equally important to bear in mind the economic challenges of the majority of young Nigerian men and the high cost of mandatory marriage rites and ceremonies. As Fidolini's study found, socio-cultural and religious demands have the tendency to instil untold fear in the minds of young men, including those with genuine intentions of getting married to their partner (Fidolini 2014). Thus, in view of the barrage of adverse economic, socio-cultural and religious demands of marriage in Nigeria, it would be unethical to assume that all men who reneged on their initial promise of marriage to their partner were only making false promises. Scarce resources and the sudden nature of unplanned pregnancies would have a tendency to ignite such a change of mind. Further research with the fathers of young unmarried mothers' children would be useful.

In any case, I agree with Lowe (2016) that the idea of motherhood as a universal condition for women, hence early marriage and childbearing, is problematic. With the socially constructed demand for early marriage and virginity before marriage, this study found that one of the major challenges faced by unmarried young women is being able to navigate through the demands of forming relationships that would lead to marriage without embarking on sexual activity. In a society where early marriage is encouraged, especially for young women, it is worrying that the conditions needed to encourage early

marriage, facilitated through romantic love language is not in place. Women are actively encouraged to formulate heterosexual relationships, but at the same time they are charged with the responsibility of not letting such relationships “go too far”. Men on the other hand are not issued with such warnings and they suffer no significant consequences in comparison with the difficulties women face.

### Poverty

Poverty, money and material gifts/gains were identified as key influences in some of the relationships the young women engaged in. From the twenty-one young unmarried mothers who voiced that their relationship was based on love and liking, at least six of them depended on the men to provide their basic needs which the family could not afford. Such provisions were sometimes used for family upkeep which meant that young women occasionally took roles as financial contributors to their families. While young women such as Vera thought her partner would “help” in solving her “financial problems”, some others were won over by unsolicited but welcome gifts, and/or promises of such. Some narratives from participants attested to this. According to Grace:

*I was carried away because of the things he said he will give to me, the money; because I had no money and clothes; I had no money to buy the things that I needed (Grace, current age 18).*

This was also confirmed by Carol and Onyi. While Carol admitted that her partner was offering her “gifts”, Onyi could not fathom why she was offered several unsolicited gifts. In her words:

*I don't know if it's a bribe or whatever, I don't know but he was coming every day by day to make sure that he buys my mind, he used to take me out (Onyi, current age 19).*

In a slightly different pattern, a participant reported sexual initiation in exchange for economic considerations. She had the expectation that the relationship or marriage would gain resources that would enable her to support her mother out of her difficult financial situation and health challenges. According to her:

*My mum's condition makes me restless every night, every day I keep on thinking about her because the trauma she was going through was much (...) I felt like marry so that if things can work out (Chisa, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Chisa's main reason for the formulation of the relationship was to marry so as to be able to support her mother financially; in her attempt to get married and help her mother, Chisa ended up in a more difficult socio-economic situation, as her partner went back on all the promises he had made her.

Findings from this study hint that poverty influences young women's decisions to form relationships. Poverty also impacts on the overall nature of the relationship, in terms of who makes decisions in the

relationship and who becomes subjected to various forms of unfair treatments. It is important to highlight that the majority of the young unmarried mothers whose narratives suggest that they did not willingly consent to the sexual encounter that resulted in their pregnancy also belong to the group that accepted financial help from the same partner. This suggests a link between negotiating sex and power as stressed many years ago in Foucault (1976) and more recently in Tolman (2005). It also draws attention to the difficulties with defining sexual consent in relation to the law and the practice. It highlights the construction of the relationship between sexual negotiation and power as articulated in Foucault (1976). For instance, if you agree when pressurised, is this consent? To answer this question, it is important to bear in mind that in Nigeria, male domination in sexual negotiations is pronounced in relationships where the male has a larger share of socio-economic resources. Jackson (2006) expressed concerns about the ability of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships to perpetuate gendered divisions of labor and male appropriation of women's productive and reproductive capacities. Therefore, I uphold that the negative impact of this aspect of heteronormativity, particularly in a patriarchal society is mainly suffered by women; and my study as discussed here provides ample evidence of these imbalances. Thus, it is important to explore views of church/community members on the reasons behind young women's sexual involvement.

### **Views of Church/Community Members on the reasons behind Young Women's Sexual Activity**

From the interviews with community and church members from different church denominations and local communities in Owerri, Imo State, South-Eastern Nigeria, poverty featured prominently as a major explanation as to why young unmarried women embark on early sexual activity in the area. From the interviews, the perceptions of church and community members regarding the reasons for young women's early sexual activity can be classified into two main categories: those that blame the young unmarried teenager for having sex early (material quest, greed, being demonic); and those that do not blame the young woman (lack of parental care, poverty). From the eighteen one-to-one interviews and four focus group discussions conducted with church and community members, no fewer than nine in 10 cited reasons that put blame on young women for early sexual activity. Some of these reasons are: material "quest", greed, watching pornographic videos and peer group influence. For instance, when asked to air her view on why young unmarried women initiate sex early, Sandra said:

*I will say one, peer pressure, exposure and then quest (...) watching all these nude films, you know, what your eyes see is what you desire, so watching nude films and also I'll say some are demonic (Sandra, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Sandra did not stop at blaming young women's "quest" for acquiring material things for their early sexual debut; she also stated that some of these young women embark on sex early because they are "demonic". Sandra's views are not only out of line with the young women's narratives, she also failed to question the responsibility of key social institutions such as the family and the church. While

Sandra's view had a religious angle to it with regard to young women being demon possessed, some other participants held views that can be termed biological. For instance, Viola voiced that:

*One reason is from family background based on their biological graph (Viola, Catholic Church Member).*

She argued that a young woman is likely to embark on sexual activity at an early age if her mother did the same during her time. Hence the mother becomes a bad influence. Lucy, another female participant, believed that uncircumcised young women have a huge appetite for sex. In her words:

*Another thing I found out is that before now, women were circumcised but now women are not circumcised so they use hand to open it. It is part of what makes them busy bodies. There is something they cut off from a woman's body and if it is cut off, it becomes shorter but now they don't cut it and the thing is long every time their blood is hot and makes them busy bodies (Lucy, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Lucy explained that young women who are circumcised are "matured" and do not indulge in sexual immorality, while those who are not circumcised have a very high desire for sex and behave irresponsibly. In a scenario where reasons for a young woman's early sexual activity are believed to be spiritual or biological, such reasons are largely outside the control of the young woman. This is mainly because spiritual and biological discourses in relation to sexual activity are framed by dominant social groups such as those found in churches. However, neither Sarah nor Viola and Lucy saw it that way. They also failed to acknowledge the dire consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM). The overall analysis of their views with regard to reasons for young women's early sexual activity (demonic influence and circumcision) erroneously blames the young woman rather than external forces.

Emerging findings suggest that the proponents of views that blame unmarried young women for early sexual initiation are mainly married mothers between the ages of 40-60. Conversely, men and younger single women held views that do not blame young women for early sexual involvement. For instance, Chino (who is in her late 20s) looked at reasons outside the control of a young woman. She argued that parental upbringing is to take the bulk of the blame. In her words:

*For a child of 12-13 years to start thinking about [sex] it's not just the sex; that might not be the primary aim of that child, it might be due to emotional deprivation, the child might be lonely, need someone to talk to and then the parents are not there, nobody is there for the child to talk to and you find out that at that point the child looks for an external body and then the person in question might make the best use of the opportunity and the child falls into problem (Chino, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Similarly, Elvis blamed poverty and inability of parents to provide for their daughters. In his words:

*I think there is an element of poverty in that. Poverty in the sense that the parents are not sufficiently capable of taking care of the kids (...) when you have an economic lack, when your parents are not giving you the requirements, the things that you need to grow up as a young person, chances are that you could look the other way, you could look at other options in the society (Elvis, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Similar views to those held by Chino and Elvis are echoed by many participants including unmarried young mothers themselves, as can be seen in the discussions earlier in this chapter. Essien and Bassey (2012) also highlighted poverty and illiteracy as leading factors in several undesirable cases of single motherhood.

This study and other studies in Nigeria, such as Ankomah et al. (2011), Asonye (2014) and Okereke (2010a) all identified poverty and the practice of sex for money or gifts as a significant factor contributing to adolescent sexual activity. These studies, however, did not explore the theoretical underpinnings and other underlying factors behind the poverty narrative from the point of view of young women themselves. By studying young women as victims of adverse gendered discourses, I argue that these young women are victims of the hostile economic circumstances of the Nigerian nation. Burr (1995) theorised power as the extent of a person's access to sought-after resources, such as money and leisure, and as the extent to which they have the capacity to have some effect on their world and upon other people's lives. Young unmarried women's lack of socio-economic power and the adverse positioning generated by such discourses cannot be overlooked. As Burr (1995) had earlier noted, this study found that rather than receiving support and justice, unmarried mothers, especially rape victims are erroneously viewed as influenced by "evil spirits", "greed" and a "quest for material things"; thus, they are wrongly accused of dressing provocatively to bring on such attacks. Several individual members of society tend to blame unmarried young women for becoming sexually active at an early age. However, this study upholds that in tune with the experiences of young women (as shared in their narratives and demographic characteristics), the patriarchal nature of the society, its social institutions, and poor socio-economic infrastructures are the defining factors.

Looking at commentaries of church/community members on the reasons behind young women's early sexual activity above, it appears that the majority of mainstream perceptions are inconsistent with the actual experiences of young women. Views of various church and community members, especially mothers, blame things that are external to the situation (such as pornography) rather than admitting to community failings. By assuming that young women's sexual activity is due to their interest in pornography, lack of circumcision and being possessed by demons, society positions women as sexually vociferous with sexually threatening and all-consuming sexual appetites (see Cornwall 2002). Bearing in mind that the key question here would be how and why such views are formulated, I

associate the formulation of such views with victim blaming and issues of power relations articulated in Burr (1995) and Foucault (1976). Society tends to target its most vulnerable; those whose voices are not strong and loud enough to be heard; those who lack the ability and resources to protect themselves. In agreement with Olaitan et al. (2012), I submit that young unmarried women are a typical example of such a group. Therefore, it is important to look at narratives of young women in relation to their level of sex education. I have explored this in the next section of this chapter.

### **Sex Education and Pregnancy Prevention**

The importance of giving young people sex education is not only to help them make timely sexuality choices and/or to teach them how to avoid sexually transmitted infections. As highlighted in the literature review chapter, sex education is also seen as a vital tool for informing young unmarried women about pregnancy prevention, knowledge about, access to and use of contraceptives as well as abortion practice. Since data from this study has shown that young women in Nigeria largely make their sexual debut in their early teens, it becomes crucial to examine their level of sex education as well as their knowledge and practice of pregnancy prevention. From the twenty-five unmarried young mothers that took part in this study, only five said that they received sex education from their parents, school or church. The low level of sex education among young unmarried women in Imo State, South-Eastern Nigeria is captured in some of the commentaries of participants. For instance, when questioned about what she knew about sex education before she became pregnant, Monica said:

*I didn't really know much then, nobody told me anything (...) so I didn't really know what will come out of [sex] or how to salvage that situation (Monica, 23, Pregnant at 18).*

Just like Monica's narrative, data from participants on levels of sex education and pregnancy prevention is rife with tales from young women who were either a "virgin" or who "don't know anything about sex" or who got pregnant "on the first day" to "the first person". This study has shown that generally, sex education is not provided to young adolescents while growing up, hence they maintain wrong impressions on the purpose of sex before sexual initiation. Not armed with the right information regarding sex, they tend to explore blindly and, in their bid to explore, they end up with early/teenage pregnancy on their first 'sexual trip'. Young women like 17 year old Princess simply "didn't understand what sex was at that time", so she "just saw sex as showing love".

To a large extent, narratives of young mothers suggest that parents did not have time for their children and as such did not maintain a close and interactive relationship with them. Opinions obtained in this study showed that most parents were less concerned about the different stages of development of their children and how they cope with each stage. Some mothers, for example, did not realize when menstruation commences in their female children; this period nonetheless remains a challenging and

very sensitive developmental period in the life of a young woman. When development commences in the female adolescent, she often get confused and overwhelmed about how to cope with the new changes and wants to talk to an older person about them. The same applies to issues around relationship with boys/men and sex. The most appropriate persons young people could discuss these development issues with are their parents.

As stressed in the literature review section, several aspects are responsible for the low level of sex education among young people. One such reason is adults' inability to recognize sex education as an essential requirement for young people as they grow up. Another is the cultural silence/taboo around issues pertaining to sex as well as deliberately misleading and incomplete information given to young people by their parents and guardians. Talking about adults and their attitudes towards sex and sex education, Princess further explained that:

*[Adults] see [sex] as a bad thing. They don't even talk about it; even when you see it in movies most times when people want to have sex they will ask us to close our eyes* (Princess, current age 17).

This again points to the unspoken words about sex by adults (parents and social institutions) as earlier theorised in Foucault (1976) and echoed in Izugbara's 2008 findings. Princess as well as many other participants such as Chika, who rely on what she "read in magazines" because "nobody" told her "about sex" capture the attitudes of adults, particularly parents on matters relating to sex. As previously stated, a few young women in this study reported having obtained some sexual reproductive health knowledge; but further probes into their level of knowledge and quality of information they have, showed that their knowledge were either wrong or shallow, and based on information obtained from various media, the church, or from their peers during informal interaction. For instance, when asked what her mum taught her in terms of sex education, 17 year old Bella voiced that her mum told her "not to go near a boy" when she is on her period. Again here, the repressive nature of the discourse on sex education made available to young women becomes palpable. The socio-cultural sex education discourse for young women is that being knowledgeable about sexual issues amounts to a certain level of promiscuity. Consequently, the narrative is more about of avoiding what society views as promiscuity rather pregnancy prevention.

Furthermore, this study upholds that a lot of parents are unapproachable and negligent about the sexual lives of their young children; therefore they do not provide their children with sex education. They do not create the enabling environment for their children to discuss sexual issues with them. Corroborating this, Carol said:



*My mom, she is very disciplined so she will not be happy if I'm telling her such thing; my daddy is a busy man he travels every time so he doesn't have our time (Carol, current age 17).*

Amaka shared the same view on this, in her words:

*I was just seventeen and I wasn't too close with my mum (...) that I could just say ok she is telling me 'avoid this or do this or do that,' so I don't know (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Without forgetting the small size of this study, these narratives affirm that parent-child communication around sexual health is poor in several Nigerian communities. Parents do not raise such discussions with their children, neither do they provide enabling environments for their children to raise and discuss sexuality issues with them. It was also observed that in situations where parents have tried their best to educate, they do not provide information in simple and easily understandable language. The meanings were ambiguous and opaque as parents used codes which often provide another meaning to what they are saying. Available discourse on sex education allows it to be provided as a form of warning and not a means of passing appropriate helpful information. For instance, as a form of sex education to Chika, the mother only told her "to be careful about men, that men are green snakes". Thus, to a large extent this confusion and ambiguity in the romance and sex education discourse will remain repressive, to the detriment of young women.

Similarly, Stacey's narrative further affirms the lack of clarity in communication between parents and teenage women, according to her:

*They told us not to go to any man during ovulation time, that if any woman should go to any man during that period that you will get pregnant (Stacey, current age 18).*

Sexuality information such as those given to Bella and Stacey are not only contradictory, they are also scientifically inaccurate. Such coded methods of education expose young women to a risk of conception rather than achieving the purpose of deterrence for which it is aimed. As they do not have complete and correct information, young women approach relationships with a vague mind-set or scant knowledge provided them by their peers which most times promote sexual involvement as a sign of maturity. Also, false or coded information raise a level of inquisitiveness in young people, particularly when they have gone against the falsehood they were taught, and found it harmless; they feel free to explore further, like a participant reported:

*I was told not to allow a man come close to me (...) when I saw my period the first time; that was the advice I was given and that was the only thing I was told - that 'if a man comes close to you, you will get pregnant'. [sex education] was useful at some point because I stopped men coming close to me, even my class members. But I noticed that when they get close to me I still*

*don't get pregnant so I didn't understand it in that manner. I felt someone was lying to me* (Princess, current age 17).

Princess' narrative of stopping men "coming close" is not only referring to sexual contact, it includes having conversations with a man whose intentions is presumed to be the initiation of a relationship that might lead to sex. Princess was not only able to hold such conversations; she also discovered that it was largely harmless to do so. With that feeling of having been lied to and not knowing what the real facts are, Princess explored further, the result of which was her eventual pregnancy.

The experience was slightly different for Sandra. Although her mother provided her sex education, the content provided her a form of reprimand. According to her:

*My mum talks to me (about sex), tells me that sex is enjoyable when you marry, that's when you enjoy sex, 'but since you're a young girl (...) you have not gotten married so you should not just go and open your legs for a man'* (Sandra, current age 19).

Although this information promotes some element of societal values, which parents expect their female children to uphold regarding marrying as a virgin, it could be considered as being more of a reproof than education.

The majority of the narratives of young women above suggest that discourse on sexual issues between parents and their children in Nigerian societies are synonymous with what Fairclough (2015) saw as an "unequal encounter". In such scenarios, "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (Fairclough 2015, p. 75). The voices of parents and other gatekeepers control and muffle out the voices of young people; leaving the latter no room to make contributions or to ask questions. Foucault (1976) questioned whether we have liberated ourselves from the times in which the history of sexuality must be seen first of all as the chronicle of an increasing repression. Findings from my study suggest that many developing communities are far from liberation from sexual repressive discourses. If we take sex education as an example, this study provides ample evidence of its poor delivery and its tendency to maintain the cultural silence and taboo around sexual issues as theorised in Foucault's writings.

Appropriate messages on sex cannot be passed on to young women if channels of communication that would allow the young woman the opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback are not in place. An analysis of young women's sources of sex education therefore shows that this feedback pattern is not available in parent-offspring sexual discussions, and cannot be achieved through channels like the media (print or electronic), and also due to lack of feedback. Adepoju (2005) argued that such media

channels are inappropriate in providing sex education to teenagers on the basis of the authenticity and accuracy of the information they provide, as well on religious and moral grounds. However, these media sources happen to be the most common sources easily available and accessible to young women whose families have failed to educate. Young women such as Grace (age 18) who “just reads books about changes in the body concerning puberty” make a case for media sources of sex education.

As a feature of dominant discourses, the deprived group in the discourse are unable to question its content and language (Fairclough 2015). From the narratives of young women above, sex education between parents and young women is depicted as a situation of lopsided and unfair relationships between a dominant group (parents) and a deprived group (young women). Thus, in instances where the deprived group asks the dominant group for clarity on various aspects of the discourse, such requests for clarity are met with silence, a negative response, and other forms of subjugation. The commentaries of some young women show that the educations they receive on sexual issues are embedded in conflicting narratives.

A small number of participants in this study reported having obtained some sexual reproductive health knowledge. However, further probes into their level of knowledge and quality of information they have, showed that their knowledge was either wrong or shallow, and based on information obtained from various media, the church or from their interactions with their peers. Looking at the church as another channel of sex education for teenagers, it was observed that, though the church attempts to fill the sex education gap with their teaching on abstinence, they are often biased, and their teachings are based on their moral standards and ‘judgmental beliefs’, not taking into consideration the present realities of the world in which the teenager survives. As also noted by Foucault (1976), the teachings of religious institutions are most times dominated by condemnation of certain behaviours based on the standards of their religious doctrines and principles. They teach to instil fear in the teenagers and not necessarily to make them understand the biological implications and societal consequences associated with early sexual initiation. For instance, talking about the sex education she received in church, Princess reported that:

*The only thing they tell us in the church is to not to have sex, ‘it’s a sin, wait until you get married’ (Princess, current age17).*

Such teachings as this are not explanatory enough to influence a teenager’s decision not to have sex, especially in situations where a young man has approached her with promises of marriage, as was observed in several interviews during this study.

Studies such as Huaynoca et al. (2014) have emphasised the importance of a sound school-based educational curriculum that accommodates sexuality education in ensuring young people delay sex until marriage or take preventive measures in sexual relationships. However, findings from my study suggest that the gap between the teenager and these channels of education has been seen to be widening; sex education is not adequately provided for young unmarried teenagers in schools and it is also not provided at home by parents. Sex education within the school is composed of a mixture of what the teenager is taught by her teachers and the information he/she picks up from friends in the course of interaction. Most often, when made available in schools, sex education is incomprehensive and is also not provided in such a manner that breaks the information down into an easily understandable form. Therefore, the information is not retained and so does not translate to knowledge. For instance, Vera recalled the type of sex education she obtained from school. In her narrative, she said:

*During my secondary education, we had something we also call sex education which makes we students more exposed to sex (Vera, current age 19).*

Vera believed that the nature of the sex education provided to her in school was counterproductive, as it did not create room for her and other young people to openly discuss their sexual desires with their teachers and other gatekeepers. It also only increased students' curiosity on sexual issues thus they explored on their own without adequate guidance. The same view was shared by Sandra; narrating her education experience she said:

*When I was in secondary school they used to teach us the way to prevent pregnancy; you can prevent pregnancy by not having sex unprotected, that's all (Sandra, current age 19).*

The content of the sex education messages received by Sandra seems more acceptable; however, both teenagers (Vera and Sandra) were unable to provide clear and concise summaries of what they were told about sex which meant that they were not able to assimilate the messages to the point where they could retain and apply them when the need arose. Narratives of young women suggest that across several generations, key agents of socialisation (such as the church, the family and school) that are charged by society to provide young women with sex education have failed in their delivery of this responsibility. However, this section would not be complete without looking at the views of church/community members in relation to role of some agents of socialisation, like the church and school in the delivery of sex education to young people.

### **Views of Church/Community Members on Sex Education**

The majority of church and community members interviewed expressed their support for giving teenagers sexuality education. Referring to the importance of providing young people with sex education, Lola said:

*It is the best thing we can ever do because there's no point hiding it away from them because they already know a lot more than we do – they watch televisions, they go on internet, they see these things even when you do not know. So the best thing is one-on-one confront them and talk about that and tell them the implications, since they already know; so there's no point hiding it from them (Lola, Catholic Church Member).*

Lola's belief that young people "already know" all about sex is not only erroneous, but also detrimental to the general well-being of young people, particularly young women. This is also in line with the inaccurate notion of married older women (discussed previously) who opined that early sexual debut of young women is because such women are uncircumcised. Such conjectures when held and shared by older women (such as Lola) increase the vulnerability of young women, especially in patriarchal communities, such as those found in Nigeria. The implication is that young women are denied the support and advice they should get from older, more experienced women.

Whilst some church members held views similar to Lola's above by agreeing that it is important to give young women sex education, findings from this study hold that church communities are unwilling to teach younger people about sexuality for various religious and cultural reasons. There is also an existing fear among adult church and community members that providing sex education would expose young people to early sexual exploration. To ensure appropriate messages on sex are passed on to young people, the channel of communicating such information is vital; such that it builds trust and promotes freedom of communication between the young person and the communicator of the ideals. In most cases, young people accept and imbibe information when it comes from persons they consider as role models such as their parents or church leaders. These significant others are expected to take the lead in providing sex education for young women. However, findings from this study reveal that the majority of adults in church communities do not undertake this responsibility, and when they do, the focus is on abstinence.

Some church and community members highlighted various reasons why sex is hardly discussed with young people in church and at home. For instance, Chino made a case for young women by highlighting the nature of the communication between adults, especially parents and young women on sexual issues. She noted that "they [young women] find it scary to discuss it with their parents, depending on the type of parents you have". This culture of silence was also captured by Damian who stressed that in Nigeria, there exists "cultural and religious taboos" that inhibit parents from providing their young ones with sex education. According to Damian:

*Traditionally, it is wrong for one to encourage or to even talk about early sex; it is a taboo primarily and because of these traditions, because of these taboos parents don't even talk*

*about it at home. So, from their homes, youths are not allowed to talk about it, their parents don't talk about it* (Darmian, Catholic Church Member).

In the same vein, another participant highlighted the taboo around giving young people sex education, particularly in the family. In his words:

*Sex education is hardly talked about within the localities, within the villages. It's unfortunate because the children end up learning about it from their peers or from the street. The schools are also not teaching them about it much unlike Europe where you have children being taught about sex education as early as early years in the secondary school. That's not the case here, it's almost seen like a taboo. You don't see somebody's mother or father sitting down to talk to him about sex education (...) even as educated as I am I don't think I ever (...) spoke about it to my sons or daughters (...) they just get, it just gets by* (Paul, Pentecostal Church Member).

Paul's commentary is in line with earlier discussed experiences of young women, where the majority of them stated that their parents did not discuss sexual issues with them. Foucault (1976, p. 6) warned that "if sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression". This statement by Foucault explains to a large extent the nature of discourses on sex in my study setting. It highlights the negative societal perception of those of who attempt to provide young people with sex education. For instance, regardless of Paul's level of education (which he referred to as very high), he admits that he does not discuss sexual issues with his children. Paul's views also underscore the point that the cultural taboo and silence with regards to parents discussing sexual issues with their children is not suppressed by the individual's level of education. Paul's level of education also did not positively impact his attitude towards premarital pregnancy and unmarried mothers. When asked about the negative attitudes of society towards unmarried mothers, he said: "if a girl is careless enough to get pregnant, she should care less about how her society mistreats her". He did not see society's inability to provide young people with sex education as culpable when a young woman becomes pregnant outside of marriage.

Taking the religious and moral positioning further, another participant argued that most adults are not role models of the type of behaviour expected of the child. In his words:

*When a parent either a mother or father is morally bankrupt he or she does no longer have the moral justification to push [sex education] on because it is said that children learn more from what the elders do than what they say* (Daniel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).

Daniel believes that parents who themselves fall short of good behaviours are "morally bankrupt" and would have nothing to offer their children in terms of teaching them good morals. This view was corroborated by Lola when she said that:

*A lot of parents have kind of lost grip of the younger ones, they can no longer direct them, they can no longer enforce discipline in them; either because we are too busy just like I am or because we do not have the moral justification to push it on them (Lola, Catholic Church Member).*

To another participant, the lack of confidence and a cordial relationship between parents and children are factors that discourage sex education. Explaining this, she said:

*Parents here, they are just too shy and formal with their children, they don't give sex education (Uzor, Anglican Church Member).*

Other situations identified in the study were such that parents, guardians and teachers actually engage in providing sex education for their wards but in a coded manner. The reason behind this according to a participant is because “It’s awful, so you need to code it”. Going by the narratives of young women discussed earlier, it appears that often times, parents do not use real phrases or real names to identify the sex act, sexual organs and some other concerns around sexuality because they feel it is unpleasant. Within families, narratives from participants such as Uzor point to the sex education given to young women by their parents as incomplete, deceptive and misinforming. Like Izugbara (2008), I found that the language of communication on the issue of sex and sex education is shrouded in secrecy and ambiguity. Failure of parents and guardians to use apt and clear terms in the description of sexual acts and sexual parts of the body further justifies Fairclough’s (2015) view of discourse on sexual issues between parents and their children, as an “unequal encounter”. Foucault (1976) also theorised about this imbalance created by the policing of the individual’s sexual choices by society through religious institutions.

Within religious circles, the clergy and some members of the laity who took part in this study expressed moderate views with regards to giving young unmarried women sex education. Those who advocated giving young people sex education stressed the need to do so cautiously, while some focused on the dogma of their religious denomination. For instance, a participant warned that “Catholicism itself frowns at such practice” thus; “it is expected that such activity should come up when you are married”. A clergyman from the Catholic Church explained further:

*By sex education I don't mean what you may have in America what you people have in Europe in the name of sex education. They call it (...) safe sex, we do not teach safe sex here, what we teach is, you know, what our fathers had in those days and what the Catholic Church normally teaches. Sex education must explain the facts of sexuality and then the commandment of Gods. There are two commandments of God we call the commandment of sex education, the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, thou shall not commit adultery and the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment you should not covet your neighbour's wife (Andrew, Catholic Priest).*

Another clergyman from the Catholic Church stressed that sex education is not about biology and physiology which focus on the act of sex itself. He believed that sex education is about showing young people how to grow in “moral responsibility” which he said is hardly taken into account. In his book on the position of the Catholic Church on sex education, Onyeocha (2014) stressed that sex education is simply a matter of teaching the sixth and ninth commandments and as such should emphasis chastity through sacraments, prayer, special devotions, awareness of the occasions of sin, and self-control. He further argued that schools teach pupils sexual immorality rather than sexual morality (Onyeocha 2014). This study has shown that attempts to preclude young women’s expression of sexual desire by teaching abstinence as stressed in “the sixth and ninth commandments” has not and will not reduce or bring an end to young women’s sexual desires and involvement. This is more so because (as Darmian, another participant rightly said), for young people, “there is that urge to know more, there is that urge to explore, there is that urge to find out”. A significant issue here is that young people’s urge to know more and explore does not sit in line with some rigid religious beliefs, for instance the broader Catholic beliefs of no contraception.

Unlike the clergy from the Catholic Church, a clergyman from the Anglican Church did not focus on the bible commandments forbidding any form of sexual activity outside marriage. He maintained that sex education is not only to be considered essential for young people, but it should also be delivered to them early. In his words:

*Parents are encouraged to educate the children sexually early, as early as possible, and not to see it as a taboo, because if they don’t teach them, some of their peers and TV will teach them, so to break that, the church encourages the parents to begin to teach the positive and negative side of these things so that children will have a balanced view of sex and approach it the way they should approach it avoiding the risks that are involved (Peter, Anglican Vicar).*

Peter acknowledged the role of peer pressure and the media in influencing sexuality decisions of young people. He saw the dangers of relegating sexual issues to background in the interaction between young people and other key agents of socialisation such as the family, school and church. This study however did not uncover what Peter and some other clergy have done in terms of incorporating sex education into their ministry.

With the emergence of sex education as a prominent theme in this study, the narratives of participants (both young women and church/community members) suggest that the discourses around sex education are largely repressive. From narratives of participants, I found that the few proponents of sex education denounce all forms of “artificial contraception” and in fact, some of such campaigns are designed to warn people of the so called dangers of embarking on sexual activity outside marriage, as well as the



dangers of using contraceptives. Like Izugbara (2004a) and Okonofua et al. (2009), findings from this study show that sex education discourse in Nigeria is tailored along the lines of cultural and religious norms and beliefs. As previously theorised in Foucault (1976) and recently in Bankole and Malarcher (2010), I argue that parents, church leaders and community leaders are oblivious and/or in denial of the reality that young people engage in sexual activities. This denial/oblivion means that such societies fail to prepare their young people adequately for sexual experience for which individuals and the entire society suffers grave consequences.

From a poststructuralist standpoint, I argue that the cultural silence on sex which Foucault (1976) looked at, sets the precedents for examining the failure of societies to talk about sex. While this study and many others mentioned in this thesis have identified numerous factors that contribute to these failings, I hold the nature of the dominant discourses around sex education as the underlying cause of inadequate sex education in Nigeria. Having endorsed a gendered rigid patriarchal ideology that remains suppressive and unfair, sex education in Nigerian society leaves young women with an unbalanced framework that does not help their sexual choices and decisions. The culmination of these issues is that although young women remain exposed to early sexual activity, many of them barely understand their own sexuality.

### **Knowledge about, Access to and Use of Contraceptives by Young Unmarried Women**

Sex education incorporates education on contraception methods, use and information on where they can be obtained. From the twenty-five young unmarried mothers that were interviewed in this study, 12 voiced having knowledge of contraceptives, but only five from the twelve were certain that they would be able to access and use contraceptives when they conceived. At least twenty-two of the twenty-five unmarried young women interviewed in this study admitted they were not using any contraceptive prior to becoming pregnant. Over the years, several studies in Nigeria and in many other African countries such as Bankole and Malarcher (2010), Okonofua et al. (2009) and Woog et al. (2015) have highlighted the low use of contraceptives among young unmarried women. Findings from this study have shown that unmarried young mothers in Owerri, Imo State, South-Eastern Nigeria are willing to use contraceptives. However, the most common contraceptive known among the young women interviewed was the condom; partly due to various campaigns by the media and/or in schools by non-governmental organisations on the condom. In the words of some participants:

*The only thing I knew was condom (Andria, current age 19).*

*If I want to meet a man, if the person is not putting on condom I cannot meet him (Onyi, current age 19),*

*If you and a guy want to meet, how you prevent pregnancy is maybe you use [condom] (Mary, current age 17).*

*We had a display in school about condom and it wasn't explained to us that it's for pregnancy, they told us it's for HIV; prevention of HIV (Princess, current age 17).*

Even as virtually all twenty-five participants who took part in this study were not using contraceptives before they became pregnant, the majority of these young unmarried women saw contraceptives as good, and an important part of sex education. Their common challenge was lack of knowledge and access. Responding to a question on what she knew about contraceptives, Becky who was 16 when she became pregnant said:

*I wasn't even aware of the different types of contraceptives you had. I just knew that abstinence was the only method so I wasn't sure, I know we hear of tablets that people take but I didn't know anything about them really so I couldn't have had access to any of that (...) because no one talks about these things" (Becky 24, pregnant at 16).*

These responses further highlight the extent of silence not only on the discussion of sex but also on teaching young people about contraceptives and how to prevent pregnancy. As such, these views are not just shared among unmarried young women.

This study recorded poor access to contraceptives by young women. A large number of participants who had knowledge of contraceptives did not have access to them. Reasons identified were various societal stereotypes and stigma (see Goffman 1963) associated with a young unmarried female (teenager) requesting to purchase a condom, for instance from a retail shop. Similarly, Lamina (2015) blamed unmarried young women's low contraceptive use on inability of health care providers to protect and respect the privacy of unmarried young women, and a show of ambivalence and discomfort by providers in communicating with such seekers. This unveils the fact that young unmarried females in Nigeria are not empowered to negotiate for safer sex.

In addition to societal stereotypes and stigma, the unmarried young women themselves believe it is solely the man's responsibility to determine if and when a contraceptive is used for sex. Young women are of the perception that it is wrong for females to initiate the use of contraceptives like condoms prior to sexual intercourse. I associate this view shared by some young women with the gendered heteronormativity notion theorised by Butler (1999). As discussed in chapters One and Two, Butler drew attention to the dangers of historical and biological construction of gender roles. Similarly, Jackson (2006) noted that for several decades, feminists have been questioning how normative heterosexuality affects the lives of heterosexuals. Today, I share in these concerns and the findings of

my study underscores the legitimacy of such concerns. For instance, when asked about their thoughts regarding a female purchasing and providing condoms for sexual intercourse, there were responses like:

*For me, it's wrong, am I a man or am I a woman?* (Onyi, current age 19).

*Just like that? I can't buy it myself! I know that if I went there to buy they will sell it, but me? I can't go* (Mary, current age 17).

Another participant corroborates this; saying that:

*It's very difficult because nobody will even want to give it to you as a little girl especially around your area where they know you are still a student, a secondary school girl, you can't just go and buy it, you will even be shy to tell them what you want to buy* (Princess, current age 17).

These responses from Onyi, Mary, Princess and many other young unmarried mothers interviewed in this study align with the views of Osakinle et al. (2013) that part of the reason for low contraceptive use by young people in Nigeria is lack of youth-friendly services. Myths about sexuality (Foucault 1976), and reproductive health, lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive rights as human rights, and gender inequality (Osakinle et al. 2013) are also identified here. This again highlights the gender discriminating attitudes of the Nigeria society wherein unlike their male counterparts, sexually active unmarried Nigeria women are perceived as promiscuous and irresponsible when they seek sexuality health information and/or contraception. Bearing in mind that “knowledge does not necessarily translate into attitudinal change where contraceptive usage is concerned” (Lamina 2015, p. 4), the situation in South-Eastern Nigeria as found by this study, raises questions about the attitudes of service providers and society in general towards sexuality and reproductive needs of young unmarried women. These negative attitudes of healthcare practitioners and the general public are not helped by the misconceptions of some young unmarried women regarding who should access to and use contraceptives. For instance, Agnes’ response on whether she uses contraceptives was:

*I don't have multiple sexual partners; I just have a permanent boyfriend* (Agnes, current age 19).

Beliefs of young women such as Agnes who see contraceptives (especially condoms) as necessary only for persons with multiple sex partners underpins the size of the problem of contraceptive knowledge, access and use among unmarried women in Nigeria. Contrary to Agnes’ beliefs, research has shown that in some cases, individuals that are identified with one sexual partner has fallen victim to various sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

## Abortion Practices

As noted in the literature review chapter, in Nigeria, abortion is illegal except when conducted to save the life of a woman. Aside from its illegality in practice, abortion is performed in secret by unskilled providers due to socio-cultural and religious norms opposing it (Makinwa-Adebusayo et al. 1997). The clandestine nature of these unsafe abortions puts the health and life of women at risk. This study found that abortion is largely unpopular among unmarried pregnant young women. Only four from the 25 unmarried young mothers interviewed in this study attempted abortion. In a wider study, Lamina (2015) held that, out of 2934 abortion seeking married and unmarried women in South-Western Nigeria, only 11.6% are adolescents. Far from the illegality of the practice, reasons given by unmarried young women interviewed in this study for not soliciting abortion were mainly fear for their life and lack of knowledge of the right procedure. As recalled by Amaka:

[My boyfriend] *was like I should try the d&c thing* [D&C – Dilation and Curettage is a term commonly used in Nigeria to describe abortion conducted by a doctor or any other medical personnel]. *Like trying to remove the thing, like abortion. I was scared* (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).

Amaka's major reason for refusing to abort her pregnancy when advised by her partner was not because of the illegality of abortion in Nigeria, but because she thought she could die in the process. Due to the unpopular nature and low societal acceptance of abortion observed in this study, abortion practice among young unmarried mothers was low and unsuccessful in situations where abortion was considered or conducted. The unsuccessful results of the abortion attempts were because they were done through unhealthy, unprofessional and locally innovated (traditional) methods, introduced to young women by members of their peer groups. This study identified several clandestine unethical methods and instruments of abortion used by young women. Some young women shared their experiences using these clandestine methods. According to Monica:

*The one I tried actually, was the one another person told me; she told me to boil a drink, an alcoholic drink [Guinness stout], that after boiling it I should pour it out and drink it as hot as it is, that if I'm pregnant (...) it will wash off the baby* (Monica, 23, Pregnant at 18).

Other traditional abortion methods discovered in this study were the consumption of chloroquine tablets daily for a prolonged period of time, usually exceeding one month and up to five months of the pregnancy, and also the consumption of a combination of ampicillin and Andrews liver salts; these however did not work for Agnes after using them, although she reported it worked for her friends, hence the recommendation. None of the local abortion methods applied by participants in this study achieved the purpose for which they were used.

Commentaries of young unmarried mothers who took part in this study have highlighted the many socio-cultural and religious factors inhibiting sex education and pregnancy prevention in general. In any case, it is important to note that apart from these socio-cultural and religious factors, other factors such as poverty and low level of education contribute to the low level of sex education and contraceptive use amongst unmarried young women. For example, twenty-one of the twenty-five young unmarried mothers interviewed in this study had no income and only three were educated to tertiary level. Thus, the sexual reproductive health and development of Nigeria's young unmarried women is jeopardised by poor economic infrastructural development of the Nigerian nation.

### **Views of Church/Community Members on Pregnancy Prevention and Abortion Practice**

Outcomes of this study revealed low contraceptive knowledge and access among young unmarried women. They were not armed with information on how to avoid pregnancy from occurring (contraception) or information on where to obtain abortion services (which is illegal in Nigeria) when pregnancy occurs. It is also noteworthy that the few young women who had knowledge of contraception did not transform knowledge into practice when the need arose. As previously stated, sex education cannot be complete if it does not incorporate education on contraceptive methods, use and where to obtain the service. In line with the experiences of unmarried young mothers discussed earlier, views of individual members of the community and churches affirms that parents and the church most often shy away from the provision of sex education and even when they do try to educate their daughters, the information is coded and thus sometimes misleading. This attitude towards sex education is largely fuelled by the rigid stance of agents of socialisation, such as the church on contraceptives and general pregnancy prevention. As a participant from the Catholic Church puts it, "the Catholic faith abhors contraception". Another participant corroborated this notion when he said that "Catholicism in itself frowns at the use of contraceptives and the likes".

The tenet of the Catholic Church influences parents' decisions to teach their young children about sex and contraception, therefore substituting such educational content with that of abstinence; this was affirmed by a participant from the Catholic Church when she said:

*What I will tell my child (...) my young child, girl or boy is to completely avoid sex because as a Catholic, you know, we do not believe in preventions, taking preventive measures; we preach avoid it (Lola, Catholic Church Member).*

Following this emphasis on abstinence as stressed by Lola, parents in the Catholic denomination are likely to choose not to educate their children on the use of contraceptives while providing them sex education. The view of a few members of Pentecostal churches is also not far from this, as they endorse abstinence for the unmarried teenager. While talking about sex and contraception for young women,

Emmanuel, a Pentecostal Church pastor insisted that “the method to prevent pregnancy is that you tell them as Christians, as children of God that they should not get involve into such”. His views were corroborated by another clergyman from the Anglican Church who maintained that “contraception is the last option”, thus his church “emphasise[s] abstinence” because “contraception is a sin” which “from strong biblical convictions and perspectives is not really an option”.

Younger participants (those below 30 years of age) from the focus group interviews with Pentecostal and Anglican churches held a slightly more flexible view of the use of contraceptives by young unmarried women. It was pointed out that education on the use of contraceptives should be provided to teenagers because the knowledge will be required where abstinence becomes difficult to practice. For instance, Ikenna, a young member of the Anglican Church said:

*You have to be so strong for you to [abstain from sex] and once staying back is not there you have to introduce contraceptives; it's like taking an extra measure and in a way, yes, God is against premarital sex but I don't think He is against contraceptives because when contraceptives are not used and then finally the woman gets pregnant you see that it leads to abortion and abortion (...) is worse (Ikenna, Anglican Church Member).*

In recognition of the contributions of rape to some cases of unmarried early pregnancy, another participant spoke about a flexible pattern of education that starts with abstinence; this, he likened to a “home safety guide”. Talking about his preferred pattern of contraceptive education which incorporates a blend of abstinence and education on contraceptives, he said:

*If I'm going to come to teach you then I should understand that what I'm going to start with should be abstinence then later you'll tell them if you can't abstain what should it be (Simon, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Capturing the thoughts of some younger members of Anglican and Pentecostal churches, Chino reiterates the dangers of not giving a young woman an all-inclusive sexuality education that includes knowledge, access and use of contraceptives. In her words:

*Pregnancy prevention is good, contraceptives is both ways but to me I feel you should teach the child everything; the child should know both contraceptives, the natural methods because you're not always outside with this child so that at each point in time, any challenge or any situation or circumstances that the child faces, the child will know the best alternative to use at that point in time; so expose the child to all kinds of things – the contraceptives, the natural methods – everything that the child needs to know (Chino, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Chino's commentaries as well as commentaries of a few other members of Pentecostal and Anglican Churches are more flexible and devoid of persistent advocacy for abstinence. Aside from being mainly lay members of the Anglican and Pentecostal Church it is also important to consider age as a factor, being that these participants with flexible views on contraception are mainly young people in their

twenties. Contrary to this, participants from the Catholic Church (laity and clergy) and older members of Pentecostal Churches held rigid views on contraception thereby insisting that abstinence is the only approved form of contraception. Chino's above statement refers to the need for providing young people, particularly young women with early comprehensive sex education before they get exposed to the wrong information on sexuality, which could lead them to practicing induced clandestine abortion or becoming unmarried mothers.

As abortion is illegal in Nigeria, it is largely not considered a major issue with church and community members, especially as it is not openly practiced and as such cannot be legally procured in regular hospitals and health centres. In any case, most of the opinions obtained from church and community members interviewed in this study were against the notion of procuring abortion for unintended pregnancies among young women. There were also religious inclinations to this. For example, while one participant from the Catholic Church simply said, "Going by my faith, yes, I do not support abortion", another affirmed that "the Catholic Church can never preach abortion". Christians in Pentecostal churches also shared the same opinion about abortion practice. Commentaries from Pentecostal Church clergy and laity drives home this no-abortion message from Pentecostal churches. According to Emmanuel:

*We don't support removing pregnancy; we advise the person, take the person to where she will be taken care of (...) for delivery* (Emmanuel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).

Similarly, another Pentecostal Church pastor held that in a situation where "any young woman gets pregnant by any man, the instruction of the bible is that the person will get married to that man" he stressed that the churches "don't advise otherwise". In agreement with the two pastors above, another participant who belongs to the Pentecostal Church denomination reemphasised that Pentecostal churches do not "encourage" abortion "because their "background is Christianity" so "It doesn't come into" their "teaching".

Over the years, a large majority of Christians, both liberal and conservatives within Nigeria, have expressed their lack of support for abortion, regardless of the condition of the pregnant woman, the unborn baby or the circumstances around the pregnancy. "Christianity set its face sternly against abortion mainly because it regards it as high religious crime that a child should die" (Olaitan 2011, p. 55). However, this study found a slight shift in this discourse. Some participants expressed flexibility on abortion and pregnancy prevention in general. For instance, Wena, a young female participant in her 20s from the Anglican Church argued that in line with the culture of the people of South-Eastern Nigeria, abortion should be allowed in certain cases, especially when the health and education of the pregnant teenager is endangered. According to her:

*It's not in our culture for a [young woman] at that very little age to start having babies; so that's when abortion is called for, and for medical reasons (...) if not, the [young woman] will develop [Vesicovaginal Fistula – a condition that allows involuntarily discharge of urine. It is believed to be mainly caused by early childbirth]” (Wena, Anglican Church Member).*

Another reason for her approval of abortion practices for young unmarried women was for educational reasons. She maintained that “a young girl in the university can't cope with going to school and also being a mum at that very young age” thus, she held that this “can also call for abortion”. With regards to the issue of abortion and pregnancy prevention in general, voices like Wena within religious settings were rare. However, this study found indications towards attitudinal change within Christian communities, particularly members of the Anglican and Pentecostal Church. In any case, the popular opinion of church and community members on teenage pregnancy is that the young woman carries the pregnancy until term and delivers it. Thus, abortion practices are generally not supported by the church no matter the denomination or the type of doctrine they practice.

The overarching place of heteronormativity in a patriarchal society like Nigeria and the resultant unfair allocation of gender roles on matters of sexual nature leave young women in a deprived position. The central message of sex education campaigns, especially those from religious institutions (churches) in various Nigerian societies, is abstinence and in some cases the message is tailored to critique the use of contraceptives and abortion practice, especially by young unmarried women. Drawing inferences from the findings of this study, it is evident that societies in Nigeria perceive a young woman who seeks for contraceptives such as condoms as wayward and irresponsible. Participants' narratives have also stressed that this perception is deeply rooted in the prevailing heteronormative discourse of Nigerian society such that young unmarried women themselves agree with the notion that it is a man's job to provide protection (condoms) for any sexual activity. In fact, it is not out of place to say that even if young women were allowed access to contraception, it would not guarantee a change of attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy.

The sex education discourse is constructed in a way that prohibits young unmarried women from taking certain steps towards their own protection from sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies. Since abortion is illegal and also attracts a lengthy jail term; and with its prohibition in religious circles, young women who become sexual active are likely to become pregnant and eventually become unmarried mothers. Although the use of condoms would guarantee sexually active young women some degree of safety, the sex education discourse prevents females from purchasing simple protection measures such as the condoms. This norm is enshrined into the tenet of Nigerian society such that young women themselves also uphold the notion that it is the duty of their male partner to introduce protective measures into their sexual relationship. This study holds that this perception is a



product of the unfair gendered discourses perpetrated by dominant social groups. Thus, young women as members of the deprived social group desist from publicly purchasing or requesting sexual protection such as condoms due to fear of societal stereotypes and stigma.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have looked at key themes from my study findings, such as young women's sexual activities, friendship/love sexual consent, sexual coercion (rape), sex education, contraception and abortion. From a poststructuralist feminist standpoint, I have integrated themes into relevant dominant discourses in operation in my study setting. I have looked at some discourses such as those pertaining to repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity and romantic love, as well as assumptions about male sexual drive and understanding of rape. By integrating these themes into existing discourses, I have provided some clarity on the general attitudes of society on issues of premarital sex and premarital pregnancy.

Through the experiences of young women themselves as gathered from their narratives, this chapter has shown that many young unmarried women embark on sexual activity at a young age for a range of reasons. Young women themselves gave reasons such as: friendship and love; hope and promise of marriage; rape; poor parenting; poverty and lack of sex education. I have also highlighted reasons proffered by church/community members on why young women embark on sexual activity in their teenage years. Contrary to the experiences of young women, the society (church/community members) is of the view that the media; peer pressure; bad economy; "demonic influence" and material quest are some of the reasons. It is evident that the majority of these reasons given by church and community members apportion blame for early sexual activity to young people; only a few don't. While young women explained their pregnancies, church and community members argued about various reasons behind such pregnancies; this points to the differences in the discourses and to the impact of dominant discourses when viewed from a poststructuralist feminist stance. It points to the tension and conflicts of interest, all of which contribute to the reasons behind unmarried motherhood. It draws attention to the experiences of unmarried mothers, and of the possible reactions of dominant social groups towards unmarried pregnancy.

As the argument about who is to take the blame for young people's early sexual activity continues, the focal point remains that unmarried young women's level of sexuality education is low and so is their knowledge about, access to and use of contraceptives. This chapter therefore has established that the rate of sexual activity of young women, whether consensual or otherwise, does not match their level of sexuality education. To this end, this chapter has looked at the role of the family, the church, school and

other agents of socialisation is educating young people on sexuality. Results from this study largely suggested that these three major agents of socialisation for various reasons have failed to give young people adequate sexuality education. The culmination of these issues is that although young women remain exposed to early sexual activity, many of them barely understand their own sexuality. They have very little knowledge about, access to and use of contraceptives; and with the criminalisation of abortion practice, religious sanctions and fear for their lives, many unmarried young women end up with unintended pregnancy and consequently become unmarried mothers.

In relation to my poststructuralist feminist epistemological positioning, I have identified prevailing discourses such as those entrenched in gendered heteronormativity and dualism as principals reason behind the experiences of young unmarried mothers and the views of church and community members. I stress that these gendered heteronormative and dualistic discourses are largely unfavourable to young unmarried mothers. Therefore, their significance will be explored in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **EXPLORING FAMILY AND CHURCH-BASED STIGMATISATION THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG UNMARRIED MOTHERS**

#### **Introduction**

The theoretical framework of this thesis was tailored to identify and explore the various discourses that adversely affect the sexual choices and experiences of young unmarried women such as those embedded in heteronormativity and dualism which emanate from faith communities where patriarchal norms are in operation. Throughout this thesis, these discourses are considered in relation to the notion of heteronormativity and binary opposites, such as the sacred versus the profane, purity versus danger, old versus young, man versus woman and good versus bad. These discourses are also discussed here in terms of their relationship with Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma as discussed in chapters One and Two. Against this backdrop, the aim of this chapter is to explore the experiences of unmarried young mothers in relation to prevailing societal attitudes towards early unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. This chapter will use commentaries of unmarried mothers who participated in this study to highlight stigmatising attitudes of individuals and social institutions such as the family and church (clergy and laity) towards unmarried pregnancy and young unmarried mothers. In line with Goffman's definition of stigma as an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman 1963), stigma here is perceived as "a mark or sign of disgrace usually eliciting negative attitudes to its bearer" (Thonicroft et al. 2007, p. 192). In light of this, and in line with Yardley (2008), much of the problematisation of teenage motherhood will be discussed here in terms of stigma. Following Goffman's early postulations on discredited and discreditable attributes as discussed in Chapter One, felt and enacted stigma are also discussed here in line with Scrambler (2004) and Stuenkel and Wong (2013).

Shaming is viewed here in relation to "shame-cultures in which individuals are controlled by public threats to personal reputation and honour" (Abercrombie et al. 1988, p. 220). This chapter looks at the impact of public shame, which according to Abercrombie et al. (1988), reflects not only on the individual, but on his/her family and kin, such that deviation from communal norms are met with strong familial sanctions. In general, stigma and shaming here will encompass all negative actions and attitudes (such as exclusion, back benching, name calling, relocation and labelling) expressed towards unmarried young mothers by key agents of socialisation. In the paragraphs below, I will use narratives of unmarried young mothers gathered from one-to-one interviews to highlight the attitudes of their families, churches, schools and other agents of socialisation towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. This chapter will also link stigma to shaming by highlighting how unmarried young mothers deal with scenarios where they are named and shamed as well as their approach towards averting shaming by social institutions to which they belong.

## Shaming and School Based Stigmatisation of Unmarried Pregnancy and Young Mothers

Of the twenty-five unmarried young mothers that took part in this study, 20 were either in secondary or tertiary education or preparing to sit exams to further their education prior to becoming pregnant. From the twenty, only one managed to write her final secondary school exams while she was pregnant. She however explained that she was able to complete her exams only because her pregnancy was not very visible for anyone to become aware of it. In her own words:

*I was still going to school with my pregnancy because I'm very slim. So it wasn't really showing. It was like it was hiding at my back. I was still going to school, though I was sleeping too much but it wasn't noticeable. The teachers, they didn't take cognizance. So I was just there until I finished my [WAEC-West African Examination Council exam] (Monica, 23, Pregnant at 18).*

Although she was able to keep her pregnancy hidden, in order to sit her final secondary school exams; as with many others, Monica's fear of being shamed and stigmatised in school meant that she could no longer continue her education. From the remaining nineteen young women who could not continue or complete their education because of their pregnancy, 16 left school on their own volition, while three were asked to leave by the school's authority. In terms of dropping out of school voluntarily, it was found that many young women find it difficult to continue and complete their education when they are faced with pregnancy. Goffman (1963) asked how the stigmatised person responded to his/her situation. In this case, this withdrawal indicates a significant show of resistance in response to the negative attitudes of society towards premarital pregnancy. Again, Goffman (1963, p. 24) stressed that "the stigmatised individual may find that he feels unsure of how we normals will identify him and receive him". This uncertainty about and fear of the response of social institutions and individuals was largely evident in the narratives of the young unmarried mothers who took part in this study. Thus, their voluntary withdrawal from school can be attributed to felt stigma as well as (envisaged) mockery from peers when they find out (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). Talking about what would have been her experience if she had continued school despite the pregnancy, one unmarried mother confirmed that she would have been shamed and stigmatised by friends. In her words, she said:

*What they will do is just call me all sorts of names, they will be telling me some words that will make [me] not feel happy, you will feel bad in that school and that can make that person to stop going to school even though the teacher did not tell that person to stop school, those words they will [say to] that person can make that person to stop school so that's why I now stopped going to school (Katie, current age 19).*

Katie's narrative underscores the point that felt stigma can be as damaging as enacted stigma as noted in the work of Scambler (2004) and Stuenkel and Wong (2013). Capturing the impact of both felt and enacted stigma, Scambler (2004) described stigma as usually a social process, experienced or anticipated, characterised by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation which results from experience,

perception or reasonable anticipation of an adverse social judgement about a person or group. A good illustration here is that Katie's anticipated (felt stigma) societal rejection, blame or devaluation, from her narrative above, became (enacted stigma) Grace's experience as shown in her narrative below. Confirming Katie's fears, Grace illustrated her first-hand experience of the humiliation she faced in the hands of her school authority and other pupils. Referring to the school's authority she said:

*They stopped me from coming to school because I was still in secondary school. They said I can't continue coming to school with the pregnancy. It's not possible in my school. They said I am a bad example. That I can't come to school because if I start coming to school, other students might decide to do what I just did* (Grace, current age 18).

Following the negative attitude of the school authority towards Grace, other pupils in school also meted out similar treatment to her, as she explained:

*They stopped talking to me (...) that day that the teachers found out, the news got to the school then everybody stopped talking to me. They started gossiping about me, anywhere they see me they will start pointing fingers at me.* (Grace, current age 18).

School for Grace became a nightmare as she was shamed, and devalued not only by her colleagues but also by her teachers and the school authority who asked her to stop coming to school. Grace's devaluation, which Stuenkel and Wong (2013) saw as a facilitator of enacted stigma eventually led to her experience of enacted stigma such that the school categorised her as "inferior or even dangerous" (see Stuenkel and Wong 2013, p. 59). Although Grace in her narrative did not clarify the formal term of her exclusion, she was no longer able to go back to school as a result of various other challenges of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood.

Apart from the challenges of negative attitudes from teachers and students as experienced by participants such as Grace above and as captured in the definition of enacted stigma by Stuenkel and Wong (2013), some participants also cited feelings of nausea, poor concentration and "sleeping in the class" as some of the challenges of going to school while pregnant. Nonetheless, fear of being named, shamed and expulsion (felt stigma) were the major reasons why some young unmarried mothers withdrew themselves from school. In this chapter, I provide ample evidence to suggest that it is difficult for secondary schools in South-East Nigeria to accommodate unmarried pregnant young women. With no proof of statutory laws forbidding young unmarried pregnant women from attending school (especially secondary schools), they are largely not allowed to continue school on moral and religious grounds. Even when they are willing to stay in school, pregnant unmarried women are usually asked to withdraw from school due mainly to the fact that the teachers view them as negative influences and a "bad example" for other students.

By noting that the disgrace and shame of the stigma becomes more important than the bodily evidence of it, Stuenkel and Wong (2013) aptly captured the reality of many participants (unmarried women) that I interviewed. These young women are more preoccupied with the fear of stigmatisation from their various social institutions, than the health challenges that are associated with teenage pregnancy. Beyond being expelled from school, other stigmatising behaviours by society also impact negatively on the young woman's reintegration into school and society after delivery. The likelihood of an unmarried young mother continuing school and finishing her education is low, even when she has delivered her baby and decides to return to school. This is worse if she remains resident in her local community where her unmarried pregnancy status is known. In the words of Owen (1995, p. 164) "those around us and those we interact with everyday hugely impact and intimately influence our so called personal space of thought and emotion". Thus, the socio-economic and emotional challenge of reintegration faced by a young unmarried mother in a society where she is well known is enormous.

### **Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes of Families towards Unmarried Young Mothers**

Addressing the issue of stigma against unmarried young mothers is a colossal task. As Yardley (2008) in her UK study puts it, teenage motherhood has been an undesirable life path that is subject to an unprecedented amount of stigma. This is because stigma flows from various aspects of the society in which the young woman lives. The weight of stigma expressed towards unmarried young mothers largely depends on the extent of grievance of agents of social control such as family, church or community over the outcome of the young woman's sexual behaviour (Burr 1995). This to a large extent defines societal behaviour towards her all through her pregnancy journey; it determines to what extent she is accepted and cared for during the period of pregnancy and how easily she reintegrates into the family, church or society after delivery. Thus, stigma here, as earlier stated, is perceived as negative actions and attitudes such as labelling, devaluing, stereotyping (Stuenkel and Wong 2013) as well other forms of shaming expressed towards an unmarried young mother by her agents of socialisation. In analysing stigma, interest is focused on the family and the church because they are the two units that an individual is closely affiliated to and that directly influence human behaviour.

In Nigeria, families from all socio-economic strata believe that they have a socio-culturally approved reputation to preserve (Obayan 1995). Family units work towards the attainment and maintenance of a certain standard of good behaviour, wherein every member of the family is expected to live their lives in a manner that helps the family uphold that good name (Obayan 1995). This high expectation however tilts more towards families that occupy higher societal positions; families where the parents occupy positions of authority in the church or within their local community. In such instances, news of a young unmarried woman who is a member of such a family getting pregnant generates a high level of negative reactions from other members of the family. This is because such action (pregnancy outside of

marriage) connotes an attribute of irresponsibility on the parents of the young woman and demeans their societal or religious image. Since society teaches its members to categorise individuals by common defining characteristics and attributes (Goffman 1963), those around the individual with attributes perceived as different begins to exercise what society thought them by way of stigmatisation. In fact, “there are aspects of society that tend to be highly valued by individuals, and when that society communicates stigma, the stigmatising beliefs are uniquely powerful” (Stuenkel and Wong 2013, p. 50). Key examples here are religious institutions, culture and family (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). Thus, in families, actions and attitudes of stigmatisation towards young mothers take different dimensions, much of which culminates into shaming and humiliating the young woman. From my findings, some of these dimensions include: displacement of the young woman; lack of marriage/forced marriage as well as isolation and physical abuse. Commentaries of unmarried young mothers below throw more light on the diverse patterns of stigmatising actions and attitudes of families.

### *Displacement*

Various forms of expression of stigmatising attitudes and actions were reported in this study. The first and most commonly reported was that of displacement; rendering the young woman homeless. Only one out of twenty-five unmarried young mothers who took part in this study were living in her family home prior to delivery. Sixteen were forced to live in care homes for unmarried young mothers; four were sent to the men who got them pregnant; while another four were sent to stay with relatives who lived far away from their nuclear family. To explore these displacements, it is important to start by going back to the concept of stigma to make a theoretical sense of what happens when a situation or event that would warrant stigmatisation arises. To this, Goffman (1963, p. 117) noted that “a very widely employed strategy of the discreditable person is to handle his risks by dividing the world into a large group to whom he tells nothing, and a small group to whom he tells all, and upon whose help he then relies”. With Goffman’s classic explanation to this in mind, I argue that the main reason why families of unmarried pregnant women embark on these displacements is to ensure that a smaller number of individuals and social institutions become aware of the pregnancy. This move by families is particularly important because unmarried pregnant women in most cases are stigmatised alongside their family members. The communal lifestyle and homogeneous nature of the Nigerian society (Obayan 1995) makes it difficult, if not impossible for parents (particularly mothers), and the entire extended family not to share in the blame or shame from a discreditable attribute associated with one member of such a family.

In general, study findings recorded incidences of parents either driving the young woman out of the family house and charging her not to return until she was no longer pregnant through abortion or delivery or asking her to go and live with the man that got her pregnant (of which the men, in most

cases, were in denial). This was typical of the kind of stigma experienced by 17-year old Carol. Narrating her ordeal, she said:

*Because of the position my mum had, she was also ashamed of herself so she said I am not going to stay in her house; that I should go to the person that got me pregnant (Carol, current age 17).*

Carol was sent out of the family house by her mother, as her father was not living with the rest of the family due to work demands. Being a patriarchal society and following the gendered script of family roles in South-East Nigeria as emphasised in Dumbili (2016), the onus is on Carol's mother to ensure her daughter does not bring shame to the father and the family at large. Again, because he also believed that Carol had brought "shame" to the family, Carol's father did not intervene in the situation; neither did he ask her to come back after hearing her story on his return. The stigma extended until after the birth and still existed at the time of this study. Carol stressed that she is not yet accepted by her family and the reason she expressed for this is "the shame" she and her family believed she brought on them for which she was "still begging for their forgiveness". Another participant had the same experience. Recounting her mother's reaction, she said:

*She asked me out of the house; she said I should get rid of the [Pregnancy] before I come back (...) very bad, but I kind of understood her anyway, but later I went back, I begged her, she said she can't accept me back with the [Pregnancy] (Andria, current age 19).*

The story was the same for Grace as well. Talking about her father's reaction to her pregnancy, she said:

*My dad did not suggest aborting the baby. After he cooled his temper he now said I should just have the baby (...) but not in his house. He sent me out of his house, maybe it's because of the disgrace, the shame I was bringing to his image (Grace, current age 18).*

This study found several cases similar to Andria and Grace where parents asked their daughter to leave the family home and go onto the street without evident concern for where their daughter went. There were also instances where forcing a quick marriage failed, parents of pregnant teenagers took their daughter to relatives who live far away, to hide the pregnancy from extended family members, church members, the community and friends of the family. In Becky's words:

*My mum was trying to hide it; she didn't want a lot of her friends to know. So it was suggested that I go over to her sister's place. At first they suggested marriage but the young man in question had left the village. He had left. So they suggested that I go over to my mum's sister's place which is far away from where we live so that people wouldn't find out (Becky, 24 Pregnant at 16).*



One of the reasons why families like Becky's attempt to hide unmarried pregnancy is to avoid labelling from other families and social institutions which according to Riddick (2000) can lead to stigmatisation which consequently allots negative expectations to those involved, both young and old. Following Goffman's analogy as I mentioned above, Becky's family handled the risk of stigmatisation by dividing those in their world on the basis of who didn't have to know about Becky's pregnancy and who had to know. In most cases those who are made aware of such situation are those in a position to help by way of keep the secret or by ameliorating the situation of the discredited or discreditable individual(s). In Becky's case, her mother's sister was made aware of the situation because she was considered to be in a position to help. Similar to Becky, 17-year-old Princess was also sent away from her family home just before neighbours could tell she was pregnant. As she recounted:

*At a point I was taken away from the house when my tummy was showing, to my elder sister's house (Princess, current age 17).*

17 year old Brenda did not have it easier even though she was raped; she was still forced out of her family home to take refuge elsewhere. She said:

*I was raped. I am not happy about it. I was afraid about my parents because if I told them they will not believe it. They will think I am lying. They said they do not want to see the baby. My mother said she has grandchildren; my daddy said he doesn't want to see me with baby, that I didn't get married. They are still angry with me at home (Brenda, current age 17).*

It is important to note that such actions by parents are not as a result of poverty or illiteracy; the majority of these parents were educated up to tertiary level with middle class incomes. Again, this clearly insinuates that a lot of parents in South-East Nigeria consider and prefer the preservation of their societal image above the welfare of their children with no consideration of the child's wellbeing or what would be the outcomes of further exposure for the young woman.

From the foregoing, a vital point to ponder over is the reason why these young women do not blame their parents for their displacements, their health/welfare challenges and other stigma related problems they face. In answering this vital question, Goffman (1963, p. 19) referred to this as "acceptance". He explained that those who have dealings with the individual fail to accord her the respect and regard which the un-contaminated aspects of her social identity have led them to anticipate extending, and have led her to anticipate receiving; she however echoes and accepts this denial by concluding that some of her attributes warrant the denial. This to a large extent explains why several young unmarried women who took part in this study did not express anger towards their family; instead, they voiced their hope for acceptance and forgiveness from the same family from where they were displaced and in some cases abandoned.

For a few others, however, their reasons for accepting being removed from their family home is linked to issues of financial security, emotional bonding and various other factors that they believe would still be provided to them by their family. These young women do not blame their parents for sending them away and for their overall ordeal, but they rather beg and hope that their parents will accept them back. Again, one main reason for this family rejection is on the grounds that the young woman embarked on sexual activity (which may not have been consensual) which resulted in “unwanted pregnancy”. This again highlights a pattern of repressive relationship between parents and their children in terms of power, knowledge and sexuality freedom (Foucault 1976); hence the young person remains at the receiving end.

### *Lack of Marriage and Forced Marriage*

Only one out of the twenty-five unmarried young mothers who took part in this study is married to the biological father of her child. Twenty-four out of the 25 unmarried young mothers who took part in this study are single, as any form of relationship they had with the male responsible for their pregnancy ended as soon as it became obvious that they were pregnant. In Nigeria and especially in the South-East, the emphasised need for female virginity (Amobi and Igwebge 2004), men’s reluctance to marry a woman who has had a child outside marriage and the overall societal reactions towards unmarried motherhood have diminished the chances of relationships and marriage for unmarried young mothers.

The traditional masculine gender script used by societies in South-East Nigeria (Dumbili 2016; Izugbara 2008) ensures that unmarried young women with pregnancy or childbirth face double jeopardy. First in coping with pregnancy-related challenges (pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing) and secondly on the issue of finding and getting married to a different man, other than the man who fathered the child she had outside marriage. The reluctance of Nigerian men to get married to a woman who already has a child she would bring into her marriage is because unmarried young mothers are largely perceived as “second hand” as they are no longer virgins. Such reluctance also stems from inheritance and property rights and other legitimacy issues. As will be discussed in more detail below, findings from this study posits that such legitimacy and inheritance issues are more pronounced when the child of the unmarried young mother is a male. South-East Nigerian societies believe that a female child from an unmarried young mother will marry and find herself a new family and thus will not pose any property and inheritance challenges to her mother’s family of orientation and family of procreation; but this is not the case with male children.

Traditionally, in South-East Nigeria, a young man with the intention of getting married to a young woman investigates the family background and character of the female he intends to marry. During this

period, the man gathers wide ranging information about the woman he intends to marry, sometimes including information about the young woman's past sexual relationships. Findings from such investigations guide the young man's decisions on whether or not to go ahead with the marriage rites. In this instance, the choice of the kind of man to marry is reduced for the young woman. She is said to have limited chances of getting married mainly due to the refusal of the suitor's family or the refusal of the suitor himself to continue with the marriage arrangement on disclosure/discovery that the female has experienced pregnancy by another man before, hence the marriage proposal is withdrawn. This pattern of reaction by men is not in line with the general discourse on love, as the foundation for marriage and family life, whereby "marriage is seen as the appropriate and natural culmination of a romantic alliance" (Burr 1995, p.72). Bearing in mind that living with a label (in this case unmarried motherhood) can lead to stigmatisation as noted in Riddick (2000), the consciousness of this fact contributes to the reasons why young unmarried women strive to keep their pregnancy status private. In doing so, the young unmarried mother is not only likely to increase her chances of getting married later in life; she is also likely to get married to her choice man. 18 year old Chika confirmed this while explaining the reason why she did not want to keep her new born child; she said:

*I still have a future, maybe someone will come to marry me now and they will tell the person (...) this one, she's carrying a child (...)', and the person will go back (Chika, current age 18).*

Similar to Chika's narrative, Jane further underlined the major reason why she did not want "people" to know she became pregnant and had a child outside marriage. In her words:

*I didn't want people to actually know that I am pregnant because if you want marriage, no guy will like to marry you because you have given birth before (Jane, current age 17).*

Another participant also voiced similar concerns to those expressed by Jane, Vera stressed that:

*There is a kind of man maybe you will get married to maybe you will not like to relate this kind of incidence to him so how (...) can I cope with carrying the baby along? I don't know (Vera, current age 19).*

Vera's decision to put her child up for adoption is hinged on the fact that her keeping and nursing her child would amount to an announcement to prospective husbands that she has had a baby outside marriage. Vera and fifteen other young unmarried mothers interviewed in care homes believed that disclosing such information would make it difficult for them to start a relationship let alone get married. In relation to the above responses from Chika, Jane and Vera, I again refer to the notion that "the stigmatised individual can also attempt to correct his condition by devoting effort to the mastery of areas of activity ordinarily felt to be closed on incidental and physical grounds to one with his shortcoming" (Goffman, 1963, p. 20). The implication of Goffman's concept here is that the value these young unmarried mothers place on marriage as prescribed by their society ignites their desire to correct their physical and social identity, in this case their pregnancy/unmarried motherhood status. In

their attempt to keep up with societal demand for heterosexual marriage and other aspects of heteronormativity, some of these vulnerable young women stay away from society and its regulatory social institutions, attempt clandestine abortion or put their child up for adoption.

Unlike Vera and others who anticipated rejection due to their unmarried motherhood status, some other young mothers such as Amaka have actually experienced rejection. Amaka, who became an unmarried mother at 17 and is now 26 years old and single, recounted how she was disapproved by the mother of one of her suitors. According to her story:

*I ran into some guy I wanted to marry; he is from my place but the mum said “Hell no, you can’t marry that bitch (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Amaka explained that the prospective mother in-law’s refusal was due to the fact that she had a child outside marriage. Amaka’s experience here points to the relationship between bodily evidence and the individual’s identity (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). In Amaka’s case, her prospective mother in-law saw her unmarried motherhood status, and that preceded and precluded every other positive social identity that the man may have seen in Amaka. Her narrative stated that the threat was so severe that although the man was willing to continue with the marriage, Amaka could not continue the relationship because of fear of what the man’s mother may do post-wedding.

The experience of family-based stigma with regards to forced marriage was different for Monica; while at home she faced deprivations and starvation as she refused to mention the name of the person who made her pregnant. On sharing her experience, she narrated that:

*I didn’t tell them because I was scared. They kept asking (...) I refused talking until after a while when I knew that it wasn’t really helping [my health]. My mum was depriving me of food (...) she was disappointed in me (Monica, 23 Pregnant at 18).*

Rather than being driven away from home, Monica recounted how her parents tricked her into making a journey with them on which they drove her to the family house of the man responsible for her pregnancy, as a way of giving her out (in marriage) with the pregnancy to the man. She continues:

*When I told them the person that impregnated me, they suggested that we travel to [another City]. I didn’t know they were taking me to the guy’s place, so they took me there. My father (...) said ‘it’s not me that impregnated you, come out, come and meet the man, come into their house and live with them. You are now a family with them (Monica, 23, Pregnant at 18).*

The focus of Monica’s parents in this case is to avoid the “shame” (see Goffman 1963) of having a pregnant unmarried daughter under their roof. To avert being shamed, the family resorted to forcing

their daughter into a marriage regardless of if the two young people want to commit long-term to each other, albeit they had sex together. This depicts an aspect of the various longstanding traditions of the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria on marriage where it is believed that a young man that gets a woman pregnant should marry her (Onyeocha 2014). Although they uphold the general belief that children come from God, families in South-East Nigeria are not effortlessly willing to take responsibility for pregnancies gotten outside of marriage. This is because of the high held moral and traditional belief that it is honourable for a young woman to first get married and then have her children in her husband's house. The implication of this traditional belief, for instance in cases of rape is that the rapist is hardly named. This is also one of the major reasons why young women refuse to reveal the name of the man.

As previously stated, four unmarried mothers that took part in this study were sent to the home of the men who made them pregnant, where they were reluctantly allowed to stay to have their baby. Such arrangements did not develop into a positive relationship or marriage after the birth of the baby. This study upholds that the main reason why parents send their daughters to the home of the men who made them pregnant is to avoid the stigma and shame associated with unmarried pregnancy. To buttress this point, biographic details of the four participants who were sent away to live with the men who got them pregnant showed that three of them have parents with good education and good means of livelihood. Thus, even as Nigeria remains a developing society, lack of education and poverty cannot be considered as the main reason why parents send their unmarried pregnant daughters away to the men who got them pregnant. Evidence from this study suggests that educated average income (middle-class) families are more likely to send their pregnant daughter away than uneducated low-income families. To put it simply, parents with viable socio-economic and educational status are more likely to worry about their societal image than parents with lower socio-economic status. This again draws attention to the emphasis laid by Stuenkel and Wong (2013) on the fundamental role of culture in determining stigma. Their argument is that culture and religion does not just play a role in stigma; they determine stigma. This line of thought is central to my analysis of stigma in this chapter; it has also been instrumental to my viewing of stigma throughout this thesis.

### *Isolation and Physical Abuse*

Participants in this study experienced various dimensions of stigmatising actions and attitudes from their parents and other family members; which includes physical isolation and abuse. To Amaka and Princess, it was a case of in-house imprisonment; they were confined to a part of the house and were not allowed to participate in chores or other family activities or even to associate with their siblings and friends. This was a form of punishment and also a measure to ensure the young woman did not leave the house so that her pregnancy is not discovered by the community. Recounting her ordeal in relation to this kind of stigma, Amaka who was only 17 when she became pregnant said:

*I don't go downstairs, I don't even visit friends, nobody comes looking for me, I don't even come out from one room. Whenever I'm pressed I have to like knock on the door, someone will open and escort me to the toilet, after that I go back to the room. When the baby was getting close to four, five months they sent me out of the house to one hidden local place so nobody will notice (Amaka, current age 26, pregnant at 17).*

This experience was corroborated by Princess. Her seclusion was borne out of the fact that her mother preaches the moral standard of young unmarried women maintaining purity until they are married. As she recalled:

*My siblings were not allowed to come close to me that much anymore. I was given a separate room in the house; I wasn't allowed to do any other thing like do my chores, just allowed to stay inside the house because they didn't want people to see me (...) because my mum is always someone that preaches against young girls getting pregnant so she was always using us her daughters as an example to others. So I felt she was disappointed finding out that one of her daughters didn't live up to what she was preaching about; so that's why she had to restrict me so my neighbours wouldn't find out (Princess, current age 17).*

Princess' sexual involvement and the resultant premarital pregnancy were seen as a deviation from the words of her mother's messages to young unmarried people. It is equally vital to highlight the underlying similarities in the experiences of Amaka and Princess; neither of them received sex education from their parents (particularly their mothers) and both were hidden away from their community and neighbours. I relate this to the idea that a person who is complicit or a person who is in a position to blackmail is also often in a position to help the blameworthy individual maintain her secret (Goffman 1963). I argue that the one reason why parents of Amaka and Princess hid them a way could also be linked to guilt about their own failings as parents. It can be deduced that the decision to put them in seclusion was to shield them from external view which would bring mockery to their mothers and by extension the family who have failed in their responsibility of providing their young daughters adequate sex education. The parents of both Amaka and Princess are known and respected members of their various communities who are also known for ensuring that young people imbibe good morals. To this effect, and as put forward by Cohen (2001), I infer that parents from both families were in denial of their failure to provide their daughters sex education. Even with their daughters pregnant outside of marriage, they deemed it necessary to retain their "good parent" image before the larger society.

Stigmatising actions and attitudes towards unmarried mothers is not perpetrated only by their parents. Findings from this study shows that over prolonged periods of time, siblings of unmarried young mothers (particularly males) also display negative attitudes and actions towards their sisters who became pregnant outside marriage. This was the experience of Amaka, who said:

*My brothers, they didn't [accept me and the pregnancy] they never did. As a matter of fact, I don't even talk with one even now (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

This prolonged display of stigmatising attitudes was, in some cases, a negative reaction resulting from the stigmatising reaction the family members in turn received from external sources – from friends and other community members – as a result of their sister's pregnancy situation. Burr (1995) stressed the adverse individual's tendency and susceptibility to outside influence and changes as a result of that individual's membership and presence in a group. For instance, in Chisa's case, she was a victim of transferred aggression from the mockery the elder brother received from friends, because she got pregnant outside marriage. She highlighted her experience thus:

*[My older brother] was like a thorn on my flesh, he beats me up (...) He said his friends were mocking him so he comes back and he is beating me. I don't even come out, I was locked up, (...) even before I will eat my mother will just sneak in and give me food because of [My older brother] (Chisa, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Having suffered immense physical abuse from her older brother, Chisa's narrative however did not point to any form of intervention from her parents, particularly her father in terms of stopping their son from physically manhandling their pregnant daughter.

Due to issues of stigma, families often do not render support to the young teenager during her period of pregnancy. They isolate her through this period as a way of punishing her and making her pay for her "wrong behaviour". Another reason for this isolation which I have mentioned earlier in this chapter is for parents to shield themselves from the socially imposed consequences (Foucault 1976) of what Goffman (1963, p. 15) called "undesired differentness" of their daughter. They are aware that the differentness is contrary to the expectation of the larger society, and as such would attract social consequences. This punishment is also to make other family members learn from their sister's experience and desist from any act that would make them repeat the behaviour. This again echoes Foucault's view that the society uses family as a tool for checking and punishing deviant behaviour (Foucault 1976). Participants recounted some attitudes and actions by family members as a way of punishing them; for instance, in Princess's case, family support was absent, she was totally ignored and abandoned by her father and siblings and the mother could not render much help so that it was not misinterpreted as being supportive of her actions. In her words, she stated that:

*My dad wasn't even talking to me anymore; he doesn't look at me the way he used to look at me, he doesn't even talk to me on the aspect maybe when I'm having some pains and crying about the baby kicking me nobody talks to me in the house (...) nobody will [console me], they will say ['that serves you right']; they just see it as my punishment (Princess, current age 17).*

The extent of negative reaction unmarried pregnancy attracts in South-East Nigeria is such that, except for very basic irregular medical care, the wellbeing of the young woman (such as Princess) with no previous pregnancy experience is scarcely considered by her own family members.

Amaka experienced another form of shaming; although her pregnancy was secluded and she was relocated during her period of pregnancy, her father exposed her to mockery from friends after her delivery and return. Telling the reason why her pregnancy was kept secret from her friends and the later exposure to her fears of being mocked due to her father's intention to shame her, she recounted:

*I know my friends; they would have mocked me, like call me all sorts of names which they later did anyway, after I put to bed, because my dad insisted on me coming back with the baby, like me moving almost everywhere with the baby. Whenever I am going out, I carry the baby around (...); he wanted to punish me (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Bearing in mind that Amaka's father was not interviewed in this study, it is not entirely clear why he chose to shame his daughter in this way, since his approach would bring shame to his family as well. In any case, the above narratives suggest that all families do not react to the news of their teenage daughter becoming pregnant outside marriage in the same way. The common factor though, is that no family in my sample reacted positively to the news.

Another issue of concern which was strongly highlighted in the previous chapter is families' unwillingness to accept responsibility for failing to provide their teenage daughters with sex education, which could have helped them to avert early unintended pregnancy. None of the unmarried young mothers that participated in this study stated that their parents blamed themselves for not giving them adequate sexuality education or teaching them how to access and use contraceptives. Actions taken by several parents and siblings of a pregnant unmarried young woman were largely aimed at protecting the image and good reputation of the family (parents and siblings) before the larger community and religious groups to which they belong. My reading of this pattern of reaction is that "it seems generally true that members of a social category may strongly support a standard of judgement that they and others agree does not directly apply to them" (Goffman 1963, p. 16). When a young unmarried woman becomes pregnant, the reactions and attitudes of parents, churches and other stakeholders are indicative of Goffman's supposition. The implication of this is that by virtue of parents' membership of specific social institutions and community groups, they may have at one point criticised and sanctioned the punishment of young women involved in unmarried sex/pregnancy. They may have also criticised parents of such young women who are directly involved. These parents are well aware of how their social institutions have dealt with similar issues in the past, to which they did not object, so they have the fear of facing similar treatments. Consequently, the reaction of parents to their daughters'



premarital pregnancy largely stems from this backdrop. Thus, the place of an unmarried pregnant teenager in the discourse of unmarried pregnancy in South-East Nigeria is at the receiving end, at the bottom, where she is trampled upon by the family, the community, and other powerful social institutions.

*Extension of Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes towards the Child of an Unmarried Mother*

Studies in Nigeria have emphasised that pregnancy and child bearing is revered in families, communities and the larger society (Cornwal 2001; Onyeocha 2014). The general notion is that children are special gifts from God that are to be accepted with open arms regardless of the circumstances surrounding their conception. Thus, a child born in or outside marriage should be accepted and loved unconditionally. Evidence from this study holds that a child born outside of marriage is not immune from stigmatisation from family members and other social institutions. Parents and siblings of an unmarried mother express negative attitudes and actions not just to the unmarried young mother, but also to her new born baby.

In Nigerian societies, male children are almost always preferred over female children because male children are believed to signify family continuity. Absence of a male child in any family causes the man and wife to defer child spacing or family planning due to the importance and significance of having a male child in any family. However, pregnancy among unmarried young women causes a change in this gender preference. For such pregnancies, the wish of parents of the unmarried pregnant teenager is that the unborn child does not turn out to be male. Parents sometimes back such wishes up with warnings and threats to the young expectant mother during the period of pregnancy. This was Chisa's experience with her father who emphasised that the gender of the baby would determine Chisa's continued stay in his house. Chisa explained further:

[He said] *that if I should give birth to a baby girl he will accept me, but if I should give birth to a baby boy he will chase me out of the house. The day I was in labour, my father took me to hospital with the same warnings, "if you give birth to a baby girl you come back, if you give birth to a boy you stay there because I'm not coming out to bail you from the hospital and nobody will dare do that"* (Chisa, 26, Pregnant at 17).

Bearing in mind that Chisa's father was neither poor nor uneducated; the question remains why he hinged Chisa's return to the family house on the sex of Chisa's baby. As he had university education and a good job, it would be assumed that he knew that Chisa is unable to determine or change the sex of her baby. The explanation to his attitude is that in Nigeria, the socio-cultural and religious beliefs of individuals impinge on their educational and professional orientation (Okonofua et al. 2008). In Chisa's case her pregnancy outcome was a boy, warned against by her father. Consequently, she was

abandoned at the hospital on stern instructions by her father and “even the midwife herself” could not get Chisa’s father to accept her and her new baby boy.

As previously mentioned, within families, the degree of negative attitudes expressed towards a child born outside of marriage is less when the child is a female. The reasons behind this, which will be discussed further in the next chapter are mainly inheritance and property rights. Whilst male children born outside marriage, once grown, are most likely to remain in the family of their mother and face severe legitimacy issues, their female counterparts could marry away from their mother’s family. Commentary from another unmarried mother captures the difference in how male and female children of unmarried mothers are perceived within the family. According to Amaka:

*At a time, my dad was cool with that. Like when he saw the baby, a baby girl, how innocent the baby is looking, he actually took her as his own (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

It is important to note that Amaka’s father isolated, displaced and punished her during her pregnancy and after. He however exempted his granddaughter from discrimination and other forms of punishments. Another participant (Princess) shared a similar experience as she recounts her father’s occasional generosity towards her baby who also happened to be female. I argue that parents of unmarried mothers (particularly fathers) who have their own sons are more likely to express negative attitudes towards their male grandchild born outside of marriage. On the other hand, if the father of an unmarried mother has no male son(s), he will be less likely to express negative attitudes towards his grandchild born outside marriage. In general, if that child is female, she is also less likely to face negative attitudes from her grandparents. The views of members of the community interviewed in this study (to be discussed in the next chapter) suggest that if the father of an unmarried mother has no son of his own, he is most likely to accept a male grandchild born outside marriage by his daughter. This gender-based reaction towards a child born outside marriage is enshrined in the deep rooted heteronormative hegemonic masculine culture of the Nigerian people.

Goffman (1963) highlighted how society constructs a stigma ideology to explain the inferiority and danger an individual represents. To this end, I argue that Chisa’s narrative above on how her father warned and eventually treated her for giving birth to a baby boy fits into how society constructs its ideology of stigma in terms of the inferiority label attached to the stigmatised and the assumed risk that such individual is said to pose. Consequently, it is safe to say that the attitudes of parents towards the child (male or female) of their young unmarried daughter are largely dependent on the existing gendered socio-cultural notion of the society towards a child born outside of marriage. This again gives validity to the early position of Goffman (1963) and recently Stuenkel and Wong (2013) that stigma is determined by culture.

## Stigmatising Actions and Attitudes of Churches towards Unmarried Young Mothers

Following the foundation laid by Goffman (1963), Stuenkel and Wong (2013) went further to identify religion as another key determinant of stigma. In this section, I have used narratives of young unmarried women to stress that indeed the church is not left out in the expression of stigmatising actions and attitudes towards pregnant unmarried young women. The stigma from the church can best be defined as judgmental whereby the stigmatised individual is devalued (see Stuenkel and Wong 2013). The unmarried young woman is seen as having deviated from the moral teachings she receives from her religious leaders and so has committed a grievous sin against God and humanity. As a result of their pregnancy status, young unmarried women who had positions and roles they played in church are relieved of their posts and banned from performing their roles. This is done for two identified reasons: first as a kind of punishment and secondly as an example to other young people in church. Church based stigma affects the young mother's church attendance and faith because, as recorded in this study, they either voluntarily keep away from attending church or they are driven away by church authorities or in some other brave cases, they maintain their attendance and endure the stigmatising behaviours towards them for as long as it lasts.

### *Church Suspension, Expulsion and Dissociation of Unmarried Young Mothers*

All twenty-five unmarried mothers that took part in this study were members of the Catholic, Anglican or Pentecostal Church. Of this number, seven whose pregnancy status became known by their church were suspended from attending church services, relieved from any role or post they held in church and/or given a "back bench". To be given a "back-bench" entails asking the individual to sit at the back of the church, barring her from taking part in activities, and communicating with other church members. This scenario is aptly captured in Grace's narration of her experience with her local Anglican Church. In her words:

*I used to sit at the back seat because of that. I was stopped from attending (...) there was a time I wanted to join the choir in my church but because of the pregnancy (...) they refused, they said they can't have such a person in their choir (Grace, current age 18).*

Similarly, 17 year old Carol who attends a Catholic Church recounted her experience:

*When they knew that I'm pregnant, they said I should stop coming to Mary League [A group of young devoted unmarried teenage women in the Catholic church who aspire to the virtues of Virgin Mary]. Even the choir members, they stopped me from coming to choir practice; they stopped me everything that I'm involved in the church. People that knew me very well, anytime I [walk past them] they will start gossiping or talking about me (Carol, current age 17).*

Becky, a member of a Pentecostal Church who was only 16 when she became pregnant was also relieved of her church role. Recounting her ordeal, she said:

*I couldn't be part of the choir anymore. I was told I couldn't be part of the choir anymore so I stopped going to choir practice and I stopped singing in church (Becky, 24, Pregnant at 16).*

Becky's withdrawal from the choir by the church authority and stopping her from singing in church meant that she was no longer viewed as a bona fide member of the church. Becky, Grace and Carol were all devalued by their respective churches. Their churches did not only devalue them, but also saw them as dangerous and inferior individuals (see Goffman 1963 and Stuenkel and Wong 2013) who are to be kept away to avoid the contamination of others who are good. Based on this premise, I will discuss this further below in this section.

With young mothers such as Becky and Grace being relieved of their roles in church, the subsisting question is why churches relieve unmarried pregnant teenagers of their church roles since such a role is the individual's service to God. One can also argue that being unmarried and pregnant will not affect the performance of the role a young person occupies in her church if she is allowed to retain her post. Just like Becky, Katie was given similar treatment by her own church. When asked if her pastor, church leaders and other church members knew about her pregnancy and how they reacted, she said:

*Yes, all of them knew about the pregnancy (...) when they knew they said I will stop coming to church; that I should not come to church again, so that's when I stopped going to church (Katie, current age 19).*

The virtue of forgiveness which is largely preached in churches was not employed by these churches, not even with the passage of time; they did not forgive, and neither did they forget. Thus, this barring could continue even after the young teenager had delivered her baby; this is what happened in Amaka's case for instance; she still received penance when she returned to church after a year. She narrated that:

*After like a year, when my baby is a year old, I went to church; then they had already heard everything about the baby and everything. They stopped me from even coming to church - the choir, the youths, the reverend (Amaka, 26, Pregnant at 17).*

Although Amaka's pregnancy was hidden as she was in fact relocated until the delivery of her child, the news of her pregnancy was known by the members of the church in her absence. In reaction to her action, she was still driven away from the church one year after her child was born. If the church, which is revered as a place of succour for the distressed, as noted in Onyeocha (2014), could label the distressed person a sinner and reserve punishment for the perceived 'sin' a year after it was committed, there will always be a question about the practicality of the virtue of forgiveness preached in churches.

This study holds that the display of stigmatising attitudes and actions towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers is not by church laity alone. The Clergy – reverend fathers, pastors and vicars were also mentioned as sources of stigma towards unmarried pregnant teenagers. As recounted by Carol:

*The reverend father is the one that ordered them to stop me from coming to Mary league that if I want to come to church that I am free to come to church but I should stop coming to choir practice and Mary league (Carol, current 17).*

Perhaps out of a feeling of disappointment, the clergy may have instructed that the young pregnant female be stopped from coming to church. As recounted by Princess:

*The reverend father in my church who was actually my friend, he was disappointed in me, he even stopped talking to me; I was asked not to come to meetings anymore, my post in the Mary League society was given to another person, so I was given like a back bench in the church (Princess, current age 17).*

Bearing in mind that both Carol and Princess were given penance by their church clergy, it is worth mentioning that there were cases where the clergy followed the route of forgiveness. For instance, about a year after having her child, Chisa was welcomed back by the reverend father in her church who encouraged her to “start serving God again”. She however noted that her reinstatement was not without “murmuring” by other members.

As mentioned previously in this section, dissociating unmarried young mothers from other young people in church was found in this study as another pattern of stigmatising behaviours expressed by churches towards unmarried young mothers. Participants affirmed that it is common for other parents in the church to feel and express concern that the unmarried young woman who is pregnant or had experienced childbirth will be a negative influence on their ‘good’ children. On this basis, such parents advise their children against association with young unmarried mothers so that they don’t get corrupted. 18 year old Grace voiced how parents of other young people in her church used her as a “bad example”. She said:

*Mothers in the church and fathers, they use me as bad example when they are talking to their children. They kept on saying that their children should not end up like me, and also my friends that attend the church they stopped talking to me because their mothers said they should not talk to me. (Grace, current age 18).*

This form of stigma was also the case for Becky. As a worker in church, church members felt disappointed by her behaviour, considering her pregnancy as a condition that was below their expectation. The cost to her was loss of the good name and image she had in church and loss of

friendship with other (young) people in the church, particularly as instructed by parents. In her statement, she said:

*Other people in church who had younger daughters stayed away from me because I was seen like a bad influence on them; everybody treated me like a plague* (Becky, 24, Pregnant at 16).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of community and church members who took part in this study cited peer pressure as one of the causes of young people's early sexual initiation and the resultant unmarried pregnancy; thus parents' act of keeping the "bad influence" away from their seemingly good children is believed to stem from this notion. However, using being pregnant as a criterion for differentiating between a "bad" (sexually active) and "good" (non-sexually active) young woman is specious. Treating a pregnant teenager as a form of contamination in order to advise and encourage other young women to abstain from sex aligns with the concept of stigma theorised by Goffman, in the sense that "we tend to input a wide range of imperfections" (Goffman 1963, p. 15). Goffman maintained that we construct a stigma theory to explain the individual's inferiority and account for the "danger" she represents, such that through these assumptions, we exercise varieties of discrimination through which we effectively reduce the individual's life chances.

The stigmatising idea of keeping those who are considered contaminated and dangerous away from those who are considered good and pure is entrenched in the historical dualistic notion of religious institutions (see Douglas 1966 and Durkheim 1995). From the findings of this study, I have identified this binary opposite discourse of sacred versus profane (Durkheim 1995), and purity versus danger (Douglas 1966) as a major cause of the various forms of stigmatisation of unmarried mothers found in Nigerian churches. By adopting a dualistic discourse that categorise individuals as bad or good, sacred and profane, pure and dangerous, these churches by way of stigmatisation tend to punish and devalue those who they perceive to be on the negative side of the divide (see Goffman 1963 and Stuenkel and Wong 2013). These religious institutions in Nigeria fail to take into account the lived experiences of the individuals. This negligence of the circumstances and experiences of individuals by religious institutions is similar to Aune (2014) findings in her UK study of feminist Christians. McGuire (2011) also stressed the importance of taking into account the multifaceted complex nature of the individual's daily religious experiences. The many challenges faced by unmarried young mothers illustrated throughout this thesis attest to the point that stigmatisation and indeed other dualistic discourses do not take these personal unique experiences into account. In fact these negative treatments are not some form of sex education; they only amount to stigmatisation, shunning and shaming of the pregnant teenager.

### *Voluntary Withdrawal from Church Attendance*

Nineteen of the 25 young unmarried women that participated in this study stopped attending church services in their local church as soon as they realised they had become pregnant. One major reason recorded in this study on why unmarried young mothers stop attending church with their pregnancy is the fear of being named and shamed as well as the anticipated stigmatising actions and attitudes of the church clergy and laity. This voluntary withdrawal provides an answer to the question raised by Goffman (1963) about how a stigmatised individual responds to her situation. This withdrawal can also be viewed as a form of resistance as well as a show of agency. Resistance here is by way of refusing and resisting the negative attitudes and actions of a social institution, in this case the church. Young unmarried mothers who may have previously witnessed stigmatising behaviours displayed towards another, tend to hide their pregnancy away from church members. They do not disclose it and in fact they relocate from the environment they are known and stay away until after delivery. They stop themselves from attending church for fear of being discovered. This is acknowledged by 17 year old Jane as she narrates:

*I didn't tell any [church members] because I won't be in the choir and I won't be (...) usher, I won't stay in usher department again; they will stop me because it's not right, they will give me back seat in the church which is not good (Jane, current age 17).*

Coupled with avoiding the punishments, stigma and disgrace associated with disclosure, Jane also had the motive of returning to the service of God in the church after her delivery. She did not want any member of the church to know about her pregnancy so that she was not relieved of her roles or segregated on her return. This desire to return to serving God in church (as was the case with Jane) points to the individual's desire to pursue and make positive changes.

In a situation where the head (pastor) of the church encourages the young woman to continue to attend church services, the young woman chooses to stay away from the church over fear of what other church members would say and do to her. For instance, after 17 year old Mary was encouraged by her pastor to continue to come to church through her pregnancy, she attended only a few times while she was in the first trimester and because she was "slim" and was wearing "big clothes". Mary could not continue as time went by as she feared other church members might realise, because if they became aware of the pregnancy, "they will gossip" and "they will say some things" that would hurt her. Again, this is not only a show of agency and resistance; it also raises the question about who bears the responsibility for change; whose duty is it to desire or make a change?

Another participant chose to keep the news of her pregnancy away from her church, not just for her sake alone but for her mum's sake. She explained that "they would have given" her "mum suspension

in the church” if they became aware of her pregnancy. One major reason behind the relocation of the majority of the twenty-four unmarried mothers who left their family home during their pregnancy is to avoid the extension of stigma to other members of the family, particularly the mother of the pregnant teenager, by social institutions such as the church. This study also found instances where the clergy advised that the pregnant teenager be relocated to a place she is not known or to a care home where she can have her child. As will be further discussed in the next chapter, the position of this study is that some of the reasons behind such advice by church clergy includes: to ensure the well-being of the young woman; to shield the young woman and her parents from being named and shamed by other church members; and to protect the image of the parents and the church in the larger society.

### **Effect of Stigma on Unmarried Young Mothers**

Coping with pregnancy can be challenging to unmarried teenager women; it is often associated with many negative reactions from friends, neighbours, and even family and church members. All twenty-five unmarried mothers who took part in this study mentioned shame and stigma as the main strain of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. Commentaries from several participants suggest that one of the first emotions unmarried mothers felt when they became pregnant was shame. For instance, when questioned about how she felt when she realised she was pregnant, 17 year old Carol simply said “I was ashamed of myself”. Like Carol, 17 year old Grace also said “I felt so ashamed of myself but it was already late, I just realised my mistakes”. Although Grace appeared to blame herself for her pregnancy, details of how she became sexually active and consequently pregnant (as discussed in the previous chapter) points to various factors outside her control.

Aside from the individual’s feeling of shame, societal shaming, stigma and discrimination have been identified as the key issues that unmarried young women have to contend with. These issues summarise not only the experiences of unmarried young mothers in this study but also the overall effect of premarital pregnancy and motherhood on young women. As Katie noted:

*Because of the shame (...) I cannot come out again, I’ve been hiding myself inside the house every day. Every day I cannot come out because of the shame (...) I don’t want my friends to see me with the pregnancy, with all the things they have been saying about me. They are laughing at me, gossiping against me (Katie, current age 19).*

Katie’s decision to stay indoors was not only because she felt ashamed of herself, it was more because of the stigma and shaming that she believed she would get from her friends and colleagues in school. These young women struggle with the shame of how to disclose their new status to family, friends, the church and the community and how the news will be received and interpreted. This is made even more difficult by the ability of family, church and community to use institutional techniques and tools to



instil sanctions and punishments (Smart 2002; Wetherell et al. 2007). These tools and techniques include: back benching [a situation where the young woman is sat at the back of the church and barred from communicating with other members]; name calling, gossiping, shunning, expulsion and labelling. All these forms of bullying leave damaging effects on the minds and bodies of virtually every young woman who becomes pregnant outside of marriage. This trend of shaming is said to be associated with the societal assumption that unmarried pregnant young women have failed to live up to the norms and values of the society, which in this case includes virginity and avoidance of premarital sex and pregnancy.

Self-condemnation and the fear of facing the stigma and shame that accompany early pregnancy are factors that drive some young unmarried women into the thought of committing suicide when they get pregnant outside of marriage. Although this study did not uncover actual practical cases of suicide attempt, several unmarried mothers held thoughts of taking their own life. It is important to highlight that thoughts of suicide among unmarried mothers is not only an effect of their becoming pregnant outside marriage; it is more of an effect of the expected negative actions and reactions of various social institutions towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. Such scenarios are even more evident in societies where the social construction of unmarried teenage pregnancy fails to relate the causes to different underlying social issues (Neiterman 2012), but chooses to blame the young woman instead. Some participants confessed to nurturing suicidal tendencies due to their condition. Recounting her experience, when she discovered she was pregnant, Zoe said:

*I really wanted to kill myself then, I wanted to hang myself (Zoe, current age 19).*

This feeling was also shared by Rose, while relating her experience she said:

*I feel that I have no more life again. I feel like going and killing myself or run away from my family” (Rose, current age 18).*

Suicide/death wishes were also associated with the feeling of lost ambitions and hopelessness. 17 year old Grace had that feeling and in sharing her experience, she said:

*I felt sad because I knew my dreams were gone and there is nothing I could do then. I just didn't know what to do. At a time, I felt like dying (Grace, current age 18).*

As Grace stated, such feelings of worthlessness and shattered dreams capture the overall feeling of several unmarried mothers that took part in this study. The lived experience of unmarried mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria is synonymous with not living and/or having nothing to live for.

## Chapter Summary

In line with Goffman's concept of stigma, this chapter has explored the stigmatisation of unmarried mothers. It has succeeded in viewing the nature of the relationship between unmarried young mothers and fundamental social institutions such as the family and the church through the lens of the experiences of unmarried young mothers. Many of the narratives of unmarried young mothers have showcased not only their overall pregnancy experiences but also their accounts of various forms of shaming and stigmatisation they suffered in the hands of their school, family and church. While some pregnant teenagers are named, shamed and expelled by their school and church, some, having witnessed others receive such ill treatments, withdraw from their school and church in fear of being stigmatised and shamed. In accordance with the poststructuralist feminist theoretical stance of this study, I have examined stigma by identifying various prevailing discourses, such as those pertaining to gendered socio-cultural and religious dichotomies. I have also identified that these discourses are also fuelled by the gendered discursive notions of heteronormativity that are entrenched in culture and religion. Having explored the impact of these discourses on the premarital sexual and unmarried motherhood experiences of young women as shown in the various themes discussed here, I will discuss this further in the conclusion chapter of this thesis.

To summarise this chapter, analysed data from young unmarried mothers' interviews suggest that reactions of families towards incidence of early unmarried pregnancy is largely in anticipation of negative reaction from mainstream society and its social institutions such as the church. The desire of families to position and present themselves in a good light within the moral compass of their larger society prompts them to sanction and, in some cases, punish their daughters who "deviate" by becoming pregnant outside of marriage.

The previous chapter concluded that adults, the church and community members have a tendency to push forward reasons that would apportion blame to young women in an incident of unmarried pregnancy. In that chapter, attention was drawn to some of the divergences between the lived experiences of young women (in relation to sexual activity, sex education and contraception) and some of the views of members of society on the issue. Linking the two chapters together, it is evident that the Nigerian society and its social institutions do not only fail to educate young women on sexual issues, it also refuses to take responsibility for this failure (chapter 4); therefore, it chooses to blame and punish the young woman (chapter 5). Again, these attitudes and negative actions towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers (stigmatisation) stem from heteronormatively gendered dominant discourses (such as repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity/rape and assumptions about male sexual drive) operating in the mainstream society.

From the narratives of young unmarried women in relation to the attitudes and actions of churches towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood, there appears to be no significant difference in the reaction of variant church denominations. However, there seems to be a noteworthy difference between the reaction of the clergy and laity. From their church clergy, young unmarried mothers largely received criticism, penance but also empathy; while they are named, shamed and stigmatised by the laity of their church. Commentaries of young unmarried mothers suggest that, similar to the image protection approach followed by their families (parents), their church clergy also attempt to protect the image of the church which in most cases results to sending these young women away. Aside from other key social institutions, these two chapters have drawn attention to the unique place of the church on the issue of premarital sex, unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers, it would be necessary to explore the differences and similarities in the views of these churches. Analysis of interviews with individual church (clergy and laity) and community members in the next chapter will shed more light on this.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ATTITUDES OF CHURCHES TOWARDS UNMARRIED PREGNANCY AND UNMARRIED YOUNG MOTHERS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

#### Introduction

A large number of the people of South-East Nigeria belong to one church denomination or another. Much of the socialisation and education young people receive comes from the church. In good and bad times, individuals, young and old, poor and wealthy, (including pregnant teenage women) rely on their church community for support. However, as I introduced in the last chapter, churches in Nigeria, (including those that show willingness to accommodate and rehabilitate unmarried young mothers) take stands that are rigid and detrimental to the future of an unmarried young mother and her child. This chapter will use narratives from focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews conducted with the clergy and laity of three major church denominations (Pentecostals, Anglicans and Catholics) to look at general attitudes of churches towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It will explore the similarities and differences in the attitudes of the three church denominations towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. It will also highlight how parents (particularly mothers) of unmarried pregnant young women become victims of stigmatisation alongside their daughters from their own church. This chapter will integrate identified relevant discourses such as those relating to religious and socio-cultural dichotomies, submission and overriding understanding of sexual activity into the attitudes of individuals and churches from the research setting.

As stated previously, stigma here is viewed as a dent, or sign of disgrace that is not only profoundly discrediting, but also provokes negative attitudes towards its bearer (Goffman 1963; Thonicroft et al. 2007). Denial on the other hand is perceived here as “an unconscious defence mechanism for coping with guilt, anxiety and other disturbing emotions aroused by reality” (Cohen 2001, p. 5). This chapter will draw attention to participants’ denial of responsibility, the blame game, and other contradictions within and between churches regarding who expresses negative attitudes towards unmarried young mothers. It will argue that church members who hold feelings of dissatisfaction about the attitudes of their church leadership towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers stay mute, thereby showing a lack of activism.

#### *The Catholic Church Clergy and Laity*

A total of thirteen Catholic clergy and laity took part in this study; eight in one-to-one-interviews and five in a focus group discussion. The majority of them expressed variant views with regards to their attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. According to Celina, a Catholic nun:

*The church is condemning it, that is why we are preaching that you should not go into sex before marriage. The church always preaches don't go into sex without marriage. First and foremost, it is against the law of God and the law of the church even the traditional law of the land too. You shouldn't just go into having sex before marriage; the church condemns it and they frown at it, especially we Catholics. When it happens, then they will tell you, you are breaking the law of God. (Celina, Catholic Nun).*

Celina's commentary largely captures a common view held by most members of the Catholic Church, particularly the clergy. Her narrative also indicates a relationship between the position of the Catholic Church on premarital sex/unmarried pregnancy and the culture/traditions of the people of South-East Nigeria. As indicated in Celina's narrative, the church believes that premarital sex amounts to "breaking the law of God". Celina's narrative depicts the lack of focus of religious institutions on the lived experiences of its members and the overbearing notion of dualism, which is synonymous with religious institutions in various societies (see Aune 2014; Griffith 1997; McGuire 2011; and Orsi 1997). Celina's narrative also ties into what Foucault (1976) saw as the ability of religious institutions (churches) to establish an imperative in the regulation of sexual choices such that individuals are required to confess to acts contravening the law, especially those pertaining to any form of sexual activity. Celina however did not state that the law of God demands punishment and stigmatisation of unmarried women for embarking on premarital sex, as can be seen in the previous chapter. Similarly, and as highlighted earlier, the community also believes that premarital sex breaks the virginity norm of society and should be punished. It is important to note that those who enforce these abstinence and virginity rules in churches are largely members of the traditional community. Like Celina's response, Timothy, a Catholic Priest stressed that:

*The church obviously frowns at [unmarried pregnancy] (...) but rejects also the idea of (...) contraception and abortion (...) and (...) encourages (...) the partners (...) if there's a pregnancy then think of marrying but you don't need to be forced to marry (...) because marriage is something that one must respect (...). For us in the church, marriage is (...) honourable (...) so if it's something that you are going to tie yourself forever, please take your time. Do not be pushed because you have committed this offence (Timothy, Catholic Priest).*

Timothy's perception of pregnancy outside marriage as an "offence" calls to mind Foucault's early theorisation of the position of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church on its establishment of the sacrament of penance. It also underscores the place of male domination within the Catholic Church. Timothy showed a reflexive line by stating that marriage isn't necessarily the answer. He however alludes to the stigmatisation of unmarried mothers by stressing that [Men] "are looking for a real spinster". The interpretation to this is that young unmarried mothers are not considered suitable for marriage (sometimes by the same men who got them pregnant) because they are no longer "real spinsters". As stressed in Burr (1995), control and exhibition of power (in this case by men in Nigeria) is a product of the shared knowledge currently prevailing in the society.

Before now, poststructuralist writers such as McGuire (2011) and Orsi (1997) have expressed concerns about the various contradictions and uncertainties surrounding religious traditions and cultures. These writers also illustrated how most of these socio-cultural and religious norms do not serve the interest of those who are expected to adhere to such cultures and traditions (Aune 2014). In chapters Four and Five, I have provided study evidence to suggest that women are crucial adherents of religious norms, and they express a high level of loyalty to these norms. However, the commentaries of young unmarried women in the two previous chapters also found that dominant discourses in religious circles are tailored to perpetuate the disempowerment of women. In this current chapter, narratives of the clergy of the Catholic analysed so far, points to male control of the Catholic hierarchy. This dampens voices and sentiments that may likely highlight the deprived place of women on all fronts, including in sexual relationships in and outside of marriage. One consequence of the deep-rooted culture of patriarchy found in Nigerian societies and social institutions such as the church is that men are unwilling to marry women who have become mothers outside marriage. This seems in conflict with the over-emphasised need for female fertility upheld by the people, since becoming a mother albeit outside marriage is proof of fertility. Contrary to the way women are perceived, a man who gets a woman pregnant outside of marriage is viewed somewhat positively as this acts as a sign of male virility.

On how he would react towards a young unmarried woman in his Church who becomes pregnant outside marriage, Andrew, another Catholic priest said:

*I would do what Christ did, Christ hated sin but loved the sinner, Christ did not condemn the woman taken in adultery and didn't stigmatise her, he welcomed her but then warning, go but don't sin again (...) I will tell her the consequences of her action on the parents who are suffering, the entire family that is suffering and let her know that; but I will welcome her and I will baptise her baby (Andrew, Catholic Priest).*

Andrew went further and admitted that he “will be worried” if a young woman in his church becomes pregnant outside marriage. He maintained that part of his response to such incident will be to “prepare” his “*sermon to train the conscience of the young girls and tell them that first of all fornication is wrong and once a young girl is pregnant she hasn't got much for the future*”. Andrew appeared to distance himself from expressing any form of stigma towards the unmarried young mother. However, his idea of “loving the sinner” and preparing his “sermons to train the conscience of young girls” (with no focus on the men who got them pregnant) could be viewed as playing the unfair gendered script of heteronormativity which includes shaming, stigmatisation and discrimination on the basis of gender. Moreover, as this study did not find any evidence showing that preparing a sermon around the pregnant young unmarried woman would deter others from premarital sex; such a sermon would rather amount to victimising and shaming the young woman.

Similar to the views of the two Catholic priests, Celine, a nun of the Catholic Church maintained that the Catholic Church condemns unmarried pregnancy but not the unmarried mother. Explaining the reaction of Catholic priests towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers she stated that:

*[The Priest] will tell you that what you have done is not good, but God has not really deserted you and you are still a daughter and don't do that again. (Celina, Catholic Nun).*

The two Catholic priests who took part in this study and Celine all saw forgiveness as the approach the Catholic Church follows in handling young female members who become pregnant outside marriage. They agreed that the Church leadership apportions punishments in the form of “penance” to the young woman and accepts her back in the fold once such penance is served. Again, this points to the judgemental role of inquisitors taken up by those in position of authority in churches, to exhort confessions and punish the sexual behaviours of those under their supervision (Burr 1995). Foucault (1976) also talked about the culture of extracting confessions in the Catholic Church where priests require members to “tell everything”, not only consummated acts, but sensual touching, all impure gazes, as well as all remarks that are considered obscene. The two priests did not clearly elaborate on the attitudes of their church members towards unmarried young mothers in terms of stigmatisation and shaming. From their commentaries, the implication is that the “community” (which church members are part of) apportion punishments to unmarried mothers such that “getting married is spoilt” because “men are looking for real spinsters”. To put the interpretation simply, members of the community are members of the church and vice versa. Both Andrew and Timothy mentioned that they would encourage marriage or sending the young woman to a home where she could have her baby and possibly put the baby up for adoption. This can be viewed as a way of rehabilitating, accepting and integrating the young woman back into society. But it can also be inferred that one of the reasons for sending the young woman to a care home is to avoid shame and stigma from members of the congregation and to protect the good image of the church.

As for the laity, some members of the Catholic Church who took part in this study affirmed that stigma is expressed towards pregnant young women, especially by the lay members of the church. In her narrative, Viola, a devout member of the Catholic Church stressed that:

*If it is a girl in Mary League, she will be forced to go away from the Mary League (...) they will be seeing that girl as somebody that has committed sin and the girls themselves will go and, you know, take some penalties from the girl (...) after the period has gone, she will not go back to the Mary League again, they will give her card to go for confession, but she will not belong to Mary League any longer. Because when they call it 'Mary League' it means that you must be like Mary (Viola, Catholic Church Member).*

Again, Viola's commentary points to the huge extent the Catholic Church pays attention to confession and penance (see Foucault 1976). Although she highlighted that the Mary League Association expects its members to "be like Mary", Viola and in fact the Mary League Association do not acknowledge that Mary too was an unmarried mother, as suggested by the Bible in Luke 2:5 (New King James Version). This contradictory notion of Mary is commonly shared among the members of the Catholic Church. Viola went further, to say that:

*Before [the unmarried young mother] could come and receive communion again (...) after the period of the pregnancy and nursing of the child, you go back to the Reverend Father and do some punishment before you could be pardoned and then accepted back into the church (Viola, Catholic Church Member).*

The point that stands out for the Catholic Church is the fact that stigma is exerted and pronounced if the young woman is a member of a church group like the Mary League, where all members are expected to stay pure and remain virgins until they are married. This study found that the "Legion of Mary" or "Mary League" organisation is only operational in the Catholic Church. Thus, in relation to how youths in a Church, particularly young women react towards a member who becomes pregnant outside marriage, there is a difference between the reaction of the members of the Catholic Church and other church denominations such as Anglican and Pentecostal. In the Catholic Church, members of the Legion of Mary Association, with the consent of the priest, place a life ban on an unmarried pregnant woman who they believe has defiled the norm of purity and virginity which they are bound to uphold. Goffman (1963) looked at the reaction of members of a social category towards attributes that they and others agree does not directly apply to them. Goffman's explanation here aptly explains the reaction of the Mary League Association and indeed the Catholic Church to an incident of unmarried pregnancy involving one of its members. The Mary League Association and the Catholic Church believe that unmarried pregnancy should not be associated with members of the association. In any case, study findings provide evidence that the Catholic Church as a whole does not impose a life ban on the young women who become pregnant outside of marriage. However, the young mother, after being perpetually banned from the Legion of Mary Association, becomes unable to get fully integrated back into the fold even with the passage of time, especially if she remains single and resides within that same community.

Asked about how the laity in the Catholic Church reacts towards unmarried pregnancy and young mothers, Lola, a member of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) said:

*I know (...) I know, negative! Negative reaction from the members (Lola, Catholic Church Member).*

Even as Lola's initial response focused on members of her organisation, her subsequent commentaries highlighted her personal negative attitude towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. This



became more evident as she stressed that she would not consider a young woman who has had a child as suitable for her son to choose for a wife. In her words:

*If my boy wants to go and get married, I wouldn't advise him to marry a girl who has had a baby before* (Lola, Catholic Church Member).

Similarly, one of the discussants from my focus group discussion with members of the Catholic Church followed the same route as Lola. He gave further reasons why he would discourage his son from marrying a young woman who has already had a child outside marriage. In his words:

*What I owe my son is to give him advice; 'the lady you are proposing to marry do you know that the lady has kids at home? When you marry this lady she will bring those children to your home, after training them they will still leave you and go to look for their father'* (Udom, Catholic Church Member).

Since having children before marriage poses no significant marriage barriers to men, narratives such as these from Lola and Udom highlight the deep-rooted gender discrimination and imbalances within religious circles. Lola and Udom moved from simply narrating how religious institutions such as the Catholic Church stigmatise and shame unmarried mother, to insentiently decoding their personal perception of unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers.

Contrary to the broadly held gender discriminatory notions of Catholic faithful against young unmarried mothers, Manny, another discussant from a Catholic Church focus group made a case for unmarried young mothers. He argued that on several societal moral issues such as premarital sex and unmarried pregnancy, the focus of the church in terms of imposing sanctions and punishment is largely on the woman. He maintained that such a bigoted stereotypical approach to apportioning penance calls for the church to be reminded that “No woman has ever made herself pregnant”, thus exempting men who impregnate young unmarried women from such shaming and other forms of punishment is grossly unjust. Manny's narrative appears to include strong critical comments about his church (The Catholic Church), which Foucault (1976) criticised for creating a sex discourse that favours its power elites. In relation to gender, I relate Manny's critique of the unfair treatment of women in Nigeria to society's unfair gender heteronormative discourse as emphasised in Butler (1999). Butler drew attention to the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and forceful beliefs.

Some other participants based their support for the unmarried young mother on their rejection of abortion practice. The general notion among Christians, particularly Catholics is that abortion is a

mortal sin; hence a young woman who does not seek abortion deserves praise. John is one of those whose support for unmarried mothers is hinged on his disapproval of abortion. He said:

*First of all, as a Catholic I will praise her. I will say there are a lot of girls who I've seen who have been pregnant in my church who are not married who are teenagers (...). If there is a situation like that I think I will respect the fact that she took the decision to keep the child (John, Catholic Church Member).*

The contradiction from John's response is the fact that although Catholics abhor abortion, they still express negative attitudes towards young women who did not abort their pregnancy. John insisted that he would not stigmatise or express negative attitudes towards an unmarried young mother but admitted that his reaction would be far from the reaction of other people in his church. He voiced that:

*They are Nigerians (...) so you would have the whole issue of victimisation and people thinking you are a terrible person and all that (John, Catholic Church Member).*

Corroborating John's statement on victimisation and blaming the young woman, a discussant from the Catholic focus group discussion voiced that:

*No woman or no girl goes out and says I'm going to get pregnant. They go out to have sex and enjoy their body and enjoy themselves (...). I will be against my sister or my niece who goes outside to get a child before wedlock or before a man comes to pay bride prize (Nwachi, Catholic Church Member).*

Another discussant from the same Catholic focus group had "the same view", maintaining that he will also "be against that in my family". There is no suggestion that commentaries of these two focus group discussants emanated as a result of group influence. Thus, such views are believed to be a product of their socio-cultural and religious orientation, which Burr (1995) and Foucault (1976) listed as one that seeks to monitor and control the behaviour of others based on what they perceive as prevailing standards of normality. Part of the reason besides this is the idealistic demand and notion that women should remain virgins until marriage. Views of Catholic members on how the church deals with the issue of early unmarried pregnancy portrayed that the Catholic Church, based on its teachings, upholds abstinence as an acceptable way of behaviour for young unmarried women. Following this, the Catholic Church abhors sex before marriage; it also abhors the use of contraceptives and the abortion of an unplanned pregnancy. Although these beliefs are upheld by the majority of members of the church, a few members of the Catholic Church do not see this as the best approach.

According to one discussant in my Catholic focus group discussion, one major cause of these rigid norms and negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy is the rigid leadership structure of the

church. He faulted and described the leadership as not representative of women despite the fact that the population of the Catholic Church is female dominated. In his statement on this, he said that:

*I just alluded that I disagree with some of the Catholic teaching on abortion, on contraception, on premarital sex, family planning and sexual life of women; I believe it's chauvinistic, I believe it is demagoguery. The Catholic Church is a male dominated religion; you have to agree with me on this, it is my opinion. Now, in the entirety of Catholic hierarchy, there is no woman in any position to say anything about the woman fold and that is a very big mistake. 60% of Catholics are women (Manny, Catholic Church Member).*

As Manny pointed out, this lack of female representation in the leadership hierarchy of the Catholic Church undermines flexible opinions that are likely to portend arguments that would favour and benefit unmarried mothers and female sexuality in general. Male domination of the Catholic hierarchy annihilates opinions that may come with built-in considerations of the vulnerability of the womenfolk on issues of sex, especially in a society that thrives of hegemonic masculinity.

Commentaries of the members of the Catholic Church who took part in this study strongly point to the age-long patriarchal leadership structure of the Church. For instance, in mid-century American Catholicism marked a time when spiritual spectatorship, moral passivity and religious subservience were deeply satisfying, particularly in relation to female participation (Orsi 1997). Recent literature from Catholic and other writers in Nigeria such as Ako-Nai (2013) and Onyeocha (2014) suggest that issues raised by Orsi are not entirely things of the past. As Ako-Nai (2013, p. 5) explicitly stated, “the Catholic Church, in spite of the need for men to hold leadership positions in the church, is still vehemently opposed to the ordination of women to play the same role as men. An attempt to forcibly ordinate women met with excommunication”. Looking at the narratives of participants from the Catholic Church and the experiences of unmarried young women discussed in the two previous data chapters, there is resounding evidence of the operation of binary opposite discourses in Nigerian religious institutions. The Catholic Church largely views issues, particularly those relating to premarital sex and pregnancy in stark binaries in which women are usually placed at the negative end of danger and profanity.

Within the prevailing discourse, any young unmarried woman involved in premarital sex, premarital pregnancy and other related issues is portrayed as a “bad example” who is no longer a “real spinster”. I identify this discourse in existence in Nigeria within the realms of religious and cultural dualism theorised as sacred versus profane (Durkheim 1912/1995; Eliade 1958), and purity versus danger (Douglas 1966). This notion of binary opposition in operation in Nigeria resonates the point that society has the ability to project a powerful image of itself, which allows it to express its potent ability to control and stir humans into action. Douglas (1966) argued that culture, in the sense of the public,

standardised values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. She admits that religious institutions view some behaviour of individuals as the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications (Douglas 1966). In this case, those (women) involved in premarital sex and pregnancy are adjudged and treated as violators who contradict the cherished heteronormative notion of heterosexuality, virginity and child bearing within marriage, most of which Jackson (2006) talked about.

Narratives of some participants here tie into the Douglas' argument that society and its institutions are structured to ensure that it retains control of the behaviours of its members to avoid anomaly. She maintained that the individual is subject to these rules put in place by the society, since "cultural categories are public matters and cannot easily be subject to revision" (Douglas 1966, p 39). However, from a poststructuralist feminist perspective, I agree with McGuire (2011) and argue that the structures put in place by society are mainly to support the status quo privilege of those in power. Douglas also saw attributing danger as one way of putting a subject above dispute, as well as a way of enforcing conformity (Douglas 1966). While Douglas attempts to see reason with the high-handed approach of religious institutions, McGuire (2011) rightly argued that popular religious rituals today are part of an informal system of social control, ritually degrading (and sometimes physically hurting) anyone who violates unspoken community norms.

Some other participants such as Charles went further, to blame other churches like the new liberal Pentecostal churches for punishing and stigmatising unmarried young mothers. When questioned about church-based stigmatisation of unmarried young mothers, he said:

*I personally (...) wouldn't want to make a victim. I wouldn't encourage a situation where [the young woman] is made a victim. That's my attitude towards it (...). But because of the challenges about the new form of Pentecostalism around (...) because that's the tendency of some churches; of a lot of churches around. They very easily pick on victims; in fact, they even acquire victims. It benefits [the new Pentecostal Churches] in the sense that they probably will gather [non-pregnant young women], they hold on to [them] and let [the pregnant] one like a scape goat (...). In practical terms, that person might be [tied up with ropes] in some churches it might get that bad" (Charles, Catholic Church Member).*

Charles believes that liberal Pentecostal churches seek out unmarried pregnant teenagers and use their challenges and societal rejection as a yardstick to deter other young women from early premarital sexual activity and pregnancy. Charles' line of thought is in line with narratives of some unmarried mothers in the previous chapters who attested to being described as a "bad example" in their church. Without providing reasons why the Catholic Church expresses stigma towards unmarried mothers, Charles blamed new liberal Pentecostal churches who he believed shames and punishes young unmarried women for their own selfish gains. He excused the Catholic Church by indicating that they

are better than others. On this basis, looking at the attitudes of other church denominations towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried young mothers becomes even more crucial.

### *The Anglican Church Clergy and Laity*

Like the previous sections, this section will attempt to examine the attitudes of the Anglican Church towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers by analysing data gathered from a one-to-one interview with an Anglican Church vicar and those gathered from a focus group discussion with lay members of the Anglican Church. Attention will also be paid to the similarities and differences between the attitudes of the Anglican Church and the two other church denominations (Catholic and Pentecostal) that took part in this study. I will also look at some significant theological differences and how they manifest in these key Nigerian church communities.

With regard to how his church handles issues of unmarried pregnancy and unmarried young mothers, Peter, a vicar of the Anglican Church narrated that:

*There will be counselling to reassure her that all is not lost and that the future can still be recovered, and (...) when we have such, the church gives a help to make sure that the person is looked after, the person has some care and the women of the church, also when such is done their attention is drawn to that (...) the women work with the person to see that she's looked after (Peter, Anglican Church Vicar).*

Peter's view may not suggest an expression of negative attitudes towards unmarried mothers, however it points to an innate culture of gendered socialisation and sexuality education. One major theological difference between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church is that, unlike Catholic priests, in Nigeria Anglican vicars are allowed to marry. Thus, Peter's marital status may have contributed to his allocation of sex education of young women as a job for "women of the church". In Nigeria, social institutions (family, school, church) allocate the role of providing young people sex education mainly to married mothers. By allocating the job of looking after an unmarried pregnant woman in his church to women, Peter appears to uphold what Dumbili (2016) referred to as the unfair gendered script in operation in Nigeria. This script of family roles expects mothers to be the sole gatekeepers of their daughters' sexuality and other aspects of behaviour. In South-East Nigeria for instance, this role allocation on the basis of gender also means that a mother is to be "blamed" for the "bad behaviour" of her daughter, while a well-behaved daughter is referred to as "*Adannaya*" which means her father's daughter. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this gendered role allocation forms the foundation for the extension of stigma to women whose young daughters become pregnant outside of marriage.

Similar to the position of the two Catholic priests discussed previously, Peter did not clearly state that members of his church express attitudes and actions of stigma towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. As was the case with the Catholic clergy, the Anglican vicar focused more on the community. Responding to a question on the reaction of the community towards unmarried pregnancy, he said:

*There is some sort of stigmatisation, (...). If a girl gets pregnant without a husband, in the community, it's not acceptable, her praise is not sung, and nobody praises her for doing that. So the community will expect that she will begin to hide (...), even after she has given birth, there is also some measure of stigmatisation that she has given birth before. For instance, if you want to go and marry this girl, somebody who knows her in the village might say 'okay I know her but do you know that she has given birth before?' you know, which is a kind of stigmatisation on her (Peter, Anglican Church Vicar).*

Given the impracticality of attempting to divorce the community from the church, this study maintains that the same members of the community who Peter believes stigmatise unmarried mothers are largely members of various churches including the Anglican Church. Again, by absolving himself of blame, Peter also expressed some form of displacement strategy.

Although Peter (given his position of authority) voiced that his church would support and provide counselling for the unmarried pregnant woman, some of his church members in a focus group discussion chose to differ. This disparity between the views of the clergy and laity of the Anglican Church was also found in the outcome of the interviews with the Catholic Church members. In the Catholic Church, the clergy voiced that they would welcome the unmarried mother, while the laity said they would not allow their son to marry a young woman who had become a mother outside of marriage. Speaking on the position of the Anglican Church on this, responses of church members pointed to the church as a source of stigma towards the unmarried young mother.

Despite the fact that the discussants in the Anglican focus group discussion are leaders of various groups in the church, in whose hands it lies to punish offending members of their group, they did not ascent to being actors in the stigmatisation of unmarried young mothers, but rather narrated the forms of stigma expressed towards young mothers by other members of the church community that they have witnessed. This notwithstanding, it was generally the opinion that the Anglican Church does not take lightly the issue of unmarried pregnancy. Part of the stigma expressed could be that of the reverend coining his sermon around the issue of fornication just to shame the young woman and make her feel guilty about her situation, while warning other young people not to fall victim of what he considers a deviant act. It can also take the form of cross-examining the young woman about her pregnancy.

Speaking on the impacts of these reactions towards the unmarried young mother, Uzor a female discussant said:

*Seriously you cannot come to church with [pregnancy] if they've not published the Banns of marriage between you and one other guy, (...) what are you coming to flaunt? They will just ask you 'ah! Sister what's up? Are you married?' and because of that kind of question you just wouldn't want to show your face in church (...) Because of you, they might make up one sermon, they can say 'all these women that go about opening their legs for men when they've not paid their bride price (...) ' and you will feel so depressed (Uzor, Anglican Church Youth Secretary).*

Uzor's commentary explains how thoughts of the actions and attitudes of church members could cause a pregnant teenager to choose to withdrawal from her church. I relate Uzor's commentary to Goffman (1963) where he noted that a fully and visibly stigmatised individual suffers a special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve such that nearly everyone will be able to see through to the heart of their predicament. In a church community like Uzor's, a pregnant unmarried teenager certainly has no hiding place as her "differentness" is not only visible but it also spoken about in sermons by those in authority.

Another discussant took a slightly different angle, as she said:

*I won't say the church stigmatises actually, because at some point it's even the church that will also comfort you when you meet the right people (...). In the Anglican Church for example, if you meet the right people you'll find those that will comfort you. Though we are one body, there are also some people who are not just there for their fellow members so that's when we talk about meeting the right people (Wena, Anglican Church Sisters Coordinator).*

Wena's explanation about laying emphasis on meeting the right church members culminated in her stating that there are still people in the Anglican Church that would stigmatise against an unmarried pregnant woman. She also questioned the willingness of the pregnant unmarried young woman to remain in church during pregnancy. She argued that:

*When we talk about the church's view about unwanted pregnancy (...) as a child of God, a Christian lady, even if you are not a born again but you've grown in the church, you've heard those morals right from when you were born, be a good child, avoid fornication, adultery and all that and you find yourself that you are now pregnant and you are a church member; naturally because you know you've been warned against all these things right from when you were young and you've fallen into that trap, you won't just want to come around (Wena, Anglican Church Sisters Coordinator).*

Wena's view echoes some commentaries of unmarried young mothers in the previous chapter who of their own volition, stopped attending church even before their pregnancy became public knowledge. The fears of an unmarried pregnant woman can also be explained by the belief that a necessary condition for social life is the sharing of a single set of normative expectations by participants (Goffman 1963). When these normative expectations are not met by reason of the individual breaking the rules, restorative measures occurs to terminate or repair the damage by control agencies or the individual herself (Goffman 1963). In relation to attitudes of churches towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers, there is a preconceived notion that sex and pregnancy should happen within marriage, and should be punished when it happens outside of marriage. Young women such as Wena, mentioned above, tend to stay away from their church on this basis. A young woman is more likely to stay away from her church due to the fear of being labelled and the stigma that will flow from such a label, rather than from guilt of fornication and pregnancy. Capturing this aptly, Riddick (2000) noted that the particular form of label relative to the cultural context in which it is being applied can increase or decrease the existing level of stigmatisation attached to it. In churches like the Anglican Church, evidence from this study holds that fear of being labelled and the shaming and stigmatisation that would come from such labelling keeps unmarried pregnant young women away from the church, when actually the church was designed to be a place of refuge and comfort.

In the Anglican Church, another form of stigma expressed by the church and parents in the church is that of withdrawing their female children from being members of the church group that the unmarried young mother belongs. In Wena's statement, she said:

*If a girl in a church [for instance] myself, I'm the sisters' co-coordinator and everybody hears that I'm pregnant, God! They will be like (...) 'what's going on?' People will start pulling their daughters away (...); I will drop my post and they will just call me for counselling. The only thing is that mothers will begin to withdraw their daughters from [Anglican Youth Fellowship] or [check] them, try to know everything. They will see it that we are coming there for waste of time; to play; we are not doing anything serious or spiritual there (Wena, Anglican Church Sisters Coordinator).*

In comparison with the Mary League group in the Catholic Church where the pregnant member is fined and permanently banned from the group, going by Wena's narrative the Anglican Youth Fellowship will also relieve the pregnant member of her role (if she was holding any). Although she would be required to leave the Anglican Youth Fellowship, she is provided with support and counselling. When compared with the Catholic Church, this study found a significant level of flexibility on various aspects of the attitudes of the Anglican Church laity and clergy towards premarital pregnancy and unmarried motherhood. As for the Mary League of the Catholic Church, having and believing in an enigmatic



female spiritual role model (in this case the “Virgin Mary”) portends a more dogmatic hard-line approach towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood.

As will be perceived from commentaries of several other participants from other churches, members of the Anglican Church did not fail to stress that there are other churches who take rigid positions on the issue. In Wena’s words:

*When you go to all these Pentecostal Churches (...) let me not call names, they take it very serious; like they will give you back seat or they won’t even like you to come near the church premises (Wena, Anglican Church Sisters Coordinator).*

Besides the common trend of finger pointing whereby churches accuse each other of having a worse reaction towards unmarried pregnancy (as seen in Wena’s commentary), it is vital also to note that just like in the Catholic Church, there are variations in the responses of the clergy and laity of the Anglican church regarding the attitudes of the church towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried young mothers. For instance, while the vicar is focusing on the “community” as the source of stigmatisation, his church members believe stigmatisation is not only from the church laity but it is also sometimes facilitated by the “sermon” of the clergy.

Like the views of the members of the Catholic Church, views of Anglican Church members analysed here also points to unfair allocation of power in favour of men. In the words of Ako-Nai (2013, p. 6), “unfortunately for the female gender, since colonization, the major religions in Nigeria, as in most African countries, preach male superiority and domination”. While scholars like Ako-Nai (2013) and Izugbara (2004b) have stressed that this imbalance of socio-political, economic and religious power to the detriment of women was brought to Nigeria by Western colonizers, I argue that Nigerians have accepted and sustained this trend. With Nigeria’s independence nearly sixty years old, I perceive narratives that continually blame Western colonizers for present day social problems of gender inequality as largely incomprehensible. While I do not absolve Western colonial religion, politics and education of any blame, I stress that the present day demands of sex education placed on women are perpetuated by members of the Nigerian society. Besides, the international community, more than before, is concerned with gender relations as it affects women (Ako-Nai 2013). Therefore, going by the views of some participants illustrated here, it is evident that those perpetuating this trend include those who are well aware of the efforts of Western governments and social institutions towards gender equality.

As postulated by Burr (1995), this study provides ample proof that social institutions (in this case churches) set barriers with which they regulate sexual choices of their members. So far in this chapter, I have highlighted how these barriers are set in Catholic and Anglican Churches and how these churches respond to those who deviate from the norm. In this section, I look at the attitudes of members of Pentecostal churches (clergy and laity) when unmarried pregnancy occurs in their churches.

In Nigeria, Catholic churches largely share the same religious norms and doctrine. This is also the case with Anglican churches. Pentecostal churches on the other hand are numerous with diverse religious norms, doctrines and leadership styles. Pentecostal churches in Nigeria can be broadly classified into two: the old-fashioned spirit filled Pentecostal churches with rigid doctrines and the new generation Pentecostal churches with more flexible doctrines. My decision to look at two different Pentecostal churches in this section is to make room for diverse views and comparisons. However, this study did not find significant differences in the views of the two different Pentecostal churches on their attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and motherhood, hence analysis of data from both churches is undertaken concurrently and commentaries of members of both churches are presented here as commentaries of members of the Pentecostal Church.

In a focus group discussion with one of the two Pentecostal churches, all discussants agreed that in their church, an unmarried pregnant young woman would be suspended from attending all church services and events. Explaining further, one of the discussants, Clara said:

*Yes, she will be given suspension and after giving birth she will come and kneel before the congregation to say she misbehaved and she will be prayed for. Then we will take her in and caution her, which is freeing her of whatever she has done* (Clara, Pentecostal Church and Womens' Leader).

In line with Clara's narrative, Sophie, another discussant explained why they follow this approach in their church. In her words:

*We use it to caution [young women] that they should be careful not to put themselves in that situation. Seeing what the pregnant girl has put herself into, they should not follow her footsteps and put themselves in that condition* (Sophie, Pentecostal Church Member and Pastor's Wife).

Sophie's narrative gives credence to views of some unmarried mothers who voiced that their church portrayed them as "bad example" to deter other young women from embarking on premarital sex. Her commentary also supports the previously highlighted views of a member of the Catholic Church who

argued that some Pentecostal churches tend to depict a pregnant teenager as “a scapegoat”, so as to gather and maintain control of the sexual decisions and behaviour of other young unmarried women. Since Goffman (1963) clearly noted that a stigma is said to have been applied when the powerful members of society label a person as deviant or different, I argue that suspending a young woman from church activities amounts to stigmatisation. My position here is on the grounds that when an individual’s condition is attached with a label, that label influences the way we see the individual (Stuenkel and Wong 2013). Perceiving and treating an unmarried pregnant woman differently from any other young woman amounts to some form of humiliation and stigmatisation, even when it is done in the name of cautioning the individual.

Similarly to the views of participants from the Catholic and Anglican churches, commentaries of some other discussants in this focus group discussion also suggest that the overall attitudes of church members towards unmarried mothers is because of the shame such pregnancies bring to the family and the church. As Clara explained:

*When you go out people will say ‘look at church person, her child got pregnant’. It is a shameful thing and defames the family it happens to. It is painful, very painful to you and you will want to give the child the torture she deserves to let her know that what she did is wrong* (Clara, Pentecostal Church Member).

Clara explained that unintended pregnancy brings shame to the mother of the pregnant teenager who must have “talked” and “cautioned” her daughter on the “implications” of premarital sex. Clara’s comments hold that an incident of unmarried pregnancy is proof that a mother’s talks and cautions “to her daughter “did not yield fruit” hence “a mother would want to give the [daughter] the torture she deserves to let her know that what she did is wrong”. As stressed in Dumbili (2016), the socialisation of women and men into different gender roles in Nigeria, facilitates sexual attitudes and behaviours that demands and ensures that women remain passive and act as gatekeepers. A consequence of this hegemonic masculine ideology is that women themselves tend to regulate and reprimand the sexual behaviour of other women.

In Nigerian societies, religious injunctions and doctrines endorse heteronormativity and the patriarchal ideology of gendered construction of female sexuality as preordained for the satisfaction of men. For instance, following Clara’s commentary (as stated above), I asked discussants the reasons for divergent and weightier sanctions and the expression of stigma towards the unmarried young woman and not the man in cases of sex and pregnancy at an early age. In response, a discussant attributed this to the unequal position that God placed a man and a woman as portrayed in the Bible. In her statement, she said that:

*The foundation of the Bible shows the position God placed a man and a woman; you can't compare a man and a woman right from time. You saw that in the time of Mary Magdalene. Listen, it was said in Israel that anybody who commits adultery will be stoned to death. But when Mary Magdalene committed adultery she was not asked where is the man you committed adultery with (...); the person that was brought out to be stoned to death was Mary Magdalene. She was the one that was brought out to be stoned to death, [the man] she committed adultery with there was never a time they wanted to give him punishment. So I will say it is based on the position that God placed a man and a woman (Sophie, Pentecostal Church Member).*

With this statement, it was unanimously affirmed by all four female discussants that God placed the man in a more advantaged position than the woman, and so in situations like the occurrence of pregnancy outside marriage, the man is not mentioned often; he is free and his own judgment is now with God while the young woman bears all the shame and punishment here on earth as meted out to her by the church clergy and laity. Under the broad umbrella of heteronormativity as stressed in Jackson (2006), Nigerian culture according to Dumbili (2016) provides the platform for men's sexual activity to be seen as normal, being sexually daring and virile; my study has also provided evidence upholding that Christianity does the same for men. The discourse is framed along the lines of the sacred versus the profane, such that the pregnant woman embodies the shame of fornication, as the pregnant body becomes a visible sign of sin. The man on the other side of the discourse has no such embodiments and as such is largely "sacred" and free.

The views of Pentecostal Church clergy are not far removed from those expressed by some lay members illustrated above. Asked what his church does when a young woman becomes pregnant outside marriage, Jamie said:

*What the church does is to suspend the girl (...). The suspension comes from the principle of Christianity because it is called fornication and if anybody is caught in fornication the next action is to excommunicate her from the church (Jamie, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Although Jamie admitted that his church suspends a young woman who becomes pregnant outside marriage, he also went on to note that the agitations of ordinary members of the church trigger the church leadership into such action. In his words:

*If it happens in the church, the first step is that [members] will agitate for suspension; which now the pastor in charge and the committee of the church will now sit to know the right option so that things will be done the right way (Jamie, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Jamie's narrative suggests that even when the pastor is reluctant to suspend the young woman from church activities on the grounds of biblical teachings on forgiveness and compassion, ordinary church members refuse to share in such leniency. He however maintained that: "if the pastor in the church is

mature enough, he has to make sure that the suspension doesn't take the girl away completely". Thus, it is the duty of the pastor to "get close to the girl, talk to her, show her some kind of love" and also "talk to the parents who will always be by her until she is delivered of the baby". Looking back at the narratives of unmarried young mothers in the previous chapter about their experiences in their various churches, there is a clear indication that the "mature" pastors Jamie is advocating for are in short supply. It is also erroneous to assume that parents will always be supportive; as the narratives of young mothers in this study suggest that in most cases, parents are not supportive. Furthermore, Jamie's colleague, Emmanuel stressed that when unmarried pregnancy occurs in his church, it is such a bad event to the point that "it seems that one has crucified Christ the second time". Emmanuel's language is viewed as similar to that of a Catholic Church nun discussed previously; she saw premarital sex as "breaking the law of God".

So far, it is clear that emerging findings from all three church denominations suggest that existing discourses on religion are framed along binary lines. Proponents of religious dualism would find these narratives suiting (see Douglas 1966 and Durkheim 1912/1995). In fact one key argument by Douglas (1966) is that society develops ways of dealing with anomalous and ambiguous events in order to protect its rigidly structured values and norms (Douglas 1966). Douglas also noted that the existence of anomaly can also be physically controlled. For instance, "in some West African tribes the rule that twins should be killed at birth eliminates a social anomaly, if it is held that two humans could not be born from the same womb at the same time" (Douglas 1966, p. 39). Here, my position is that religious institutions of society view unmarried pregnancy as some form of anomaly which they attempt to correct through stigmatisation as defined in Goffman (1963). Like Douglas, participants in my students discussed in this chapter did not directly address those responsible for the construction of what is sold to society as dangerous anomalous events of contamination that should be eliminated. They also did not highlight the beneficiaries of these dichotomies; neither did they address the inequalities perpetuated against certain individuals simply on society's construction of gender as stressed by Butler (1999). Consequently, I argue that this exaggerated notion of sexual sin and the consequences attached to it are tools used by the church to control the sexual choices of its members.

Unlike Jamie and his church members from the focus group discussed, Emmanuel did not directly admit that his church leadership suspends the young woman. With regards to the kind of attitudes his members would express towards the young unmarried pregnant woman, Emmanuel admitted that:

*They will be speaking, they will be murmuring, they will not be happy, it leads the church to cry, it leads the church to weep, even to declare fasting and prayer and tell God to forgive* (Emmanuel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).

From Emmanuel's commentary, it can be inferred that church members' absorbed cultural traits influences the actions and attitudes of the church leadership towards unmarried pregnancy. Nonetheless, the lack of cohesion in the views of members of the clergy and laity points to a significant disparity in individual's attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers, even when such individuals are members of the same church. McGuire (2011) captured this by indicating that the lived religious experiences of individuals could differ irrespective of such individuals being members of the same religious group.

While some are in denial about exhibiting negative attitudes and stigma towards unmarried early pregnancy and unmarried young mothers; some others attribute such behaviours to other church groups. Thus, I infer that the biblical saying in Matthew 7:5 (New King James Version) which asked Christians to "First remove the beam out of" their "own eye", before they "can see clearly to remove the speck out of" their "brother's eye," is scarcely followed within Christianity. As previously stated, this study uncovers a dogged trend of finger pointing between churches, even those of the same denomination. Questioned about the attitudes of his church towards unmarried pregnancy, a pastor from another Pentecostal Church opined that rather than helping the pregnant teenager, "many churches today will suspend the girl, suspend the family; I don't want to mention names". Without mentioning how his church handles such cases, he went on to air his view on the right approach churches should follow. He cited examples within another church (not his church) which has the right attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy. In his words:

*I think what the church should do here is be able to step into the matter, see what it's all about. I know of a church (...) they have homes where they put this kind of girls (...) they have homes, very big wonderful place (Daniel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Going by Daniel's response, church clergy and lay members in Nigeria are not only known for castigating their contemporaries; they are also known for singing the praise of those they believe to be upholding their desired religious doctrines and morals.

Regarding whether they have had an incident of unmarried pregnancy in their church and how it was handled, the head pastor from the Pentecostal Church who took part in my second focus group discussion said:

*We've had, but the thing is (...) the lady, the young man was willing to marry her (...) So they rushed home and they got married (...) but the church could not join them anymore because it's not holy matrimony (Daniel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Daniel explained that when pregnancy occurs prior to a church wedding, the couple are brought together and their union is blessed privately without an elaborate wedding ceremony. This type of joining together was also found to be the case in the Catholic and Anglican Church, where the clergy (Peter, Anglican Church Vicar) clarified that the vicar “can find a way to consummate the relationship, but it’s not white wedding”. He went further to highlight the difference in marriage vows between a wedding involving premarital pregnancy and a wedding without a pregnancy incident. The vicar explained that when premarital pregnancy is involved, “it is now blessing of that relationship which has already started, so what the church will be asking them is not will you take this [person], the question will be, will you continue to take this woman as your wife”. I posit that this distinct pattern of marital consummation set aside for an unmarried mother as practiced by all three church denominations that participated in this study, amounts to shaming and stigmatisation of the unmarried pregnant woman. It is also another exhibition and perpetuation of institutionalised gender discrimination, since there is no evidence that such rules were put in place to check the premarital sexual activity of men and thus does not apply to a man who has a child outside marriage.

In addition, it is important to note that initiating a downgraded marriage ceremony and marital vows for a woman who has become pregnant or a mother before marriage is largely supported by the church laity. Church members such as Sol believe that a marriage ceremony involving an unmarried mother is “no longer a holy matrimony” because “the bed is defiled”. In Christian communities, especially Pentecostals, the figurative language of getting married with “bed undefiled” is used as a caveat to remind members of the consequences of premarital sex and pregnancy. In a case where “the bed is defiled”, church members adopt various strategies to ensure that church apportion punishment to the individual(s) involved. Illuminating the pressure faced by the clergy from the laity in such scenarios, Daniel, the pastor of a Pentecostal Church explained that:

*Even in the church we have different sets of people. In fact, sometimes they criticise the pastor, that the way you handle the matter is not good and some persons want you to bring the whole matter in front of the whole congregation and announce it to the entire church so that the shame can be big (Daniel, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

In simple terms, Daniel’s narrative points to institutionalised indifference and insensitivity by the majority of church laity towards various socio-economic and health challenges of early premarital pregnancy faced by a young woman.

Some participants whose narratives are illustrated in this section identified as wives of pastors or women leaders in their respective churches. In Nigeria, there are cases in some Pentecostal churches where women are ordained pastors either as individuals or because their spouse is a pastor. In such

cases however, women in such authoritative positions do not necessarily see things from an unmarried mother's point of view, especially those in the Pentecostal denomination. In Anglican and Pentecostal churches, women who are married to vicars and pastors respectively or those who are ordained pastors hardly use their position to fight the cause of other women. Writing about feminism and religion in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Ako-Nai (2013) noted that the emergence of women as leaders in the Christian world is a late twentieth century development, and it is a situation that is still critically challenged in many orthodox churches. In this chapter, I posit that women's church leadership issues raised by some participants, such as Manny above, have been and remain complex ones that span beyond the Catholic Church, especially in developing societies. When compared with the positions and roles played by men in religious circles in Nigeria, churches are not structured to reflect on the vulnerability of women on issues of sex. In fact, the enshrinement of hegemonic masculinity in religious places is usually backed with biblical injunctions and narratives. As previously hinted in Burr (1995), Foucault (1976) and Tolman (2005), narratives of participants in this chapter point to another scenario where societal norms have handed superior power of sexual negotiation to men, sometimes with the endorsement of women themselves.

#### **Attitudes of Churches towards Parents (Mother) of an Unmarried Young Mother**

Through their narratives of their personal experiences, young unmarried women who took part in this study have shown that they have various challenges, aside from the negative attitudes and actions of their family towards their premarital pregnancy. For instance, virtually every one of these young women was engulfed by fear of how their larger social groups (church, local community, school etc) would treat them and their family, especially their mother. Here, my intention is to draw attention to the attitudes of the clergy and laity towards church members who are parents of an unmarried pregnant woman.

The stance of church authorities and the attitudes of members regarding premarital sex place a lot of stigma, not only on unmarried young mothers but also on their parents. This stigmatisation comes in various forms including "back-benching", which as previously mentioned, entails asking the individual to sit at the back of the church, barring her or him from taking part in activities, and communicating with other church members. It is important to note that there are other instances where a church member could be back-benched, for instance if the individual is caught stealing. But while it is theoretically possible for a man who is caught stealing to be back-benched, this study upholds that it is largely women who are back-benched in cases of premarital pregnancy. This concept of stigma through back-benching further underlines the view of early stigma theorists such as Goffman (1963), that stigma and its alternative words leaves the individual bearing the differentness with the plight of discreditable and/or discredited situation.



Primarily, this study upholds that the expression of negative attitudes towards parents of an unmarried mother is not in doubt. More importantly, evidence from this study indicates that the mother of the unmarried pregnant teenager is the major recipient of these negative attitudes and actions and not the father. Even so, those who perpetrate such negative attitudes and actions remain in denial. As is the case with attitudes of churches towards unmarried mothers, it also points to the trend of blame apportioning within and between churches. To further examine the overall attitudes of the church towards the parents of an unmarried young mother, I have looked at commentaries of participants from three church denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal) in the paragraphs below.

In the Catholic Church in Nigeria, every married woman is mandated to be a member of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO); thus virtually every woman in the church belongs to this group. With regard to unmarried pregnancy in the Catholic Church, some level of stigmatisation is displayed towards the parents (particularly the mother) of the pregnant young woman. Reporting on this, Viola, a devout member of the CWO narrated the form of stigmatisation and sanctions meted out by the church on the deviating female and her parents. Her report reveals that mothers share in the blame for issues of pregnancy among their unmarried female child(ren) and are punished alongside their daughter(s). She said:

*In the Catholic Church, a Christian mother [a member of the CWO] whose daughter got pregnant will be stripped of her motherhood cloth...because of the negligence; you will pay a fine of ten thousand naira [approximately fifty pounds] because you allowed your daughter to get pregnant (Viola, Catholic Church member).*

Unlike Pentecostal and Anglican churches, the CWO in Nigeria is known for their unique revered membership uniform which Viola referred to here as “Motherhood cloth”. Beyond being an article of clothing, this uniform is perceived as a symbol of virtuousness, femininity and motherhood. Loyal and non-defaulting members keep this uniform as an invaluable asset for as long as they live, and even in death the individual is, in most cases, buried in the uniform. As can be seen in Viola’s narrative, this study found that one of the few ways a member of the CWO can lose her uniform is if her daughter becomes pregnant outside marriage. This form of shaming found in the Catholic Church is similar to back-benching which is found mainly in Pentecostal churches. The key difference is that while a back-bench penance last over a period of time, a woman whose motherhood uniform is removed by the CWO does not get it back. Agreeing with Viola’s narrative, another participant who is also a member of the CWO in the Catholic Church noted that:

*In most cases the CWO will say because your [daughter] is pregnant or your [daughter] has a baby out of wedlock you are no longer a member (Lola, Catholic Church Member).*

Lola's narrative suggests that the mother of the pregnant teenager could also face a life ban from the CWO. It shows a movement of stigma and shame from one body to another, both female. While this is similar to the reaction of the members of the Catholic "Mary League/ Legion of Mary" discussed above; this pattern of reaction is different from the reaction of mothers and young women from the Anglican and Pentecostal church denominations. There is no evidence from this study to suggest that this extensive network of penance found in the Catholic Church as stressed by Viola and Lola is also available in Anglican and Pentecostal churches. One significant reason for this difference in attitudes is linked to the veneration of "Virgin Mary" the mother of Christ by the Catholic Church; a trend that is not found in Pentecostal and Anglican churches. Whether the hard-line approach of the Catholic Church towards unmarried pregnancy could be justified on this basis remains an unanswered question, especially as Mary herself could also be viewed as an unmarried mother. There is no evidence to suggest that Mary was officially married to Joseph before she became pregnant. There is however, biblical evidence that Joseph did not father Mary's child (Jesus) as it was through the Holy Spirit. In any case, the reaction of different church denominations towards the mother of an unmarried pregnant young woman amounts to shaming, discrimination and other forms of humiliation. As noted by one participant, "such mother begins to lose face" especially as her husband does not face similar indignity.

In South-East Nigerian societies, one major reason a mother is blamed alongside her daughter in an event of unplanned premarital pregnancy is because of the gendered allocation of sex education of the girl to mothers. In a similar manner, the church believes that a mother should know and be able to attest to the child's behaviour at any point in time. Venting his frustration over having women at the receiving end of all the blame, shame and humiliation, a discussant from my Catholic focus group narrated that:

*The church vilifies, ostracises and hangs out the woman to dry. The father will say 'it's your daughter'. The young woman and her mother, both of them are treated the same (Manny, Catholic Church Member).*

Manny's narrative aligns with the general saying in Nigeria that "when the child is good it belongs to the father, when it's bad it belongs to the mother". The belief is that it is the sole duty of the woman to educate her daughter on sexuality issues, thus she is to share in the blame if anything goes wrong.

Again, some participants focused on the ill-treatment of parent(s) of the young mother by other churches rather than their own church. This is captured succinctly in Pastor Dave's commentary:

*If it happens in some Pentecostal [churches], they will suspend the girl, suspend the mother, (...) they will give them back seat. When you are in that back seat nobody greets you in that church, nobody visits you, nobody says hello to you (Dave, Pentecostal Church Pastor).*

Dave voiced that “some Pentecostal churches” shame and stigmatise parent(s) through various means, all of which are symbolically known as back benching. He also spoke about the situation in the Catholic Church; the taking away of the mother’s union cloth. Aside from members of the clergy such as Dave, some Pentecostal Church members were also quick to criticise the attitudes of other churches towards a woman whose daughter becomes an unmarried mother. For instance, Clara, one of the discussants in my focus group discussion said:

*There are some like [Anglican] in my place, if your daughter gets pregnant, you [the mother] will be given suspension and will sweep the church for five months and given penalty that follows. Maybe you will pay five thousand or ten thousand for allowing your child to indulge in that kind of act (Clara, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Such monies generated from penalties are mostly kept in the fund of the organisation. Clara quickly pointed out that this is not the case in her own church. She said:

*But in our church what we do is that the mother of the pregnant teenager, if she is a committed Christian and you know it was not her fault that her daughter got pregnant, the punishment will be on the teenage girl who got pregnant (Clara, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Clara claimed that her church will exempt the mother of the pregnant teenager “if it was not her fault that her daughter got pregnant”. However, there is ample evidence from this study that churches apportion penance to members whose behaviour, or that of their children, are believed to undermine the individual’s Christian identity and the image of the church. More importantly, the lived experiences of unmarried mothers discussed in the previous chapter upholds that the majority of young mothers (especially Pentecostal Church members), who left their family home did so to prevent themselves and their parents (particularly their mother) from being punished by their church.

Those whose parents sent away also stated that their parents did so to avoid the shame and penance that they would receive from their church if the church became aware of the pregnancy. In general, this study found a pattern of correction by way of suspending or ostracising the defaulting young woman and perhaps her mother by church authorities and ordinary members. It also shows a consistent pattern of blame whereby participants paint a picture of other churches as worse than theirs. Overall, punishing only the mother of a pregnant unmarried young woman and not her father is yet another exhibition of the patriarchal and gender discrimination tendencies of the Nigerian society.

As highlighted in various parts of this thesis, a society where patriarchy is widespread has the tendency to blame women for virtually everything that goes wrong in the family, especially those things pertaining to nurturing of children. Mother blaming constitutes a fundamental aspect of the patriarchal

institution of motherhood (Chase and Rogers 2001; Lapierre 2007). This study found that those at the receiving end of societal stigmatisation in an event of unmarried pregnancy are mainly the pregnant teenager and her mother. Stigmatisation of the unmarried young woman and her mother starts from the point of disclosure or discovery of the pregnancy at the family level and extends to the community and the church. The attitudes of society towards unmarried mothers correlates with Goffman (1963, p. 11) that stigma becomes “bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier”. This pattern of stigmatisation which is largely focused on women again points to the unfair impact of hegemonic masculinity and the dualistic discourses of heteronormativity in Nigerian society.

### **Lack of Activism of the Laity on Attitudes of Church Leadership towards Unmarried Pregnancy and Unmarried Mothers**

Data from this study suggests that several individuals from different Christian denominations are not satisfied with the norms and doctrines of their church in relation to unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. There are many instances where members of the laity expressed dissatisfaction over the handling of cases of unmarried pregnancy by their church leadership and by groups within the church, as well as by individual members. However, there is little or no evidence of follow-up activism by these disgruntled church members with regards to changing the stigmatising and general negative attitudes of the church. In the words of Martha:

*The church doesn't even help matters, yes, in as much as they preach about it; most times they say 'she has gone astray, still accept her back' but individually in that church nobody practices what they preach. It's still like trying to do the same thing the community is doing (...); I don't think I like their way (Martha, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Martha's narrative tends to dissociate and exempts her from the arm of “the church” that dishes out negative attitudes toward unmarried young mothers. However, aside from sharing these views in a one-to-one interview, there is no significant evidence of activism from Martha who went on to give a practical example on how her pastor handled a case of unmarried pregnancy in her church. In her words:

*I didn't like the way he handled it (...), the topic of discussion that day was all about the girl involved. You know, trying to use her as an example to other people and it made her feel so bad. You know, talking about her in church and everybody [was] turning back looking at her; (...) I felt very bad. It shouldn't be done in that manner. (Martha, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Martha's narrative attracts strong credence on the grounds that members of the clergy from other church denominations previously discussed here had expressed willingness to prepare their sermon around the individual who became pregnant outside marriage. She went on to give various reasons why

her pastor's approach is detrimental to the young woman who after such "sermon" faced various forms of shaming, finger pointing, name calling and shunning.

Similar to Martha's commentaries, another participant summarised the reaction of her church towards an unmarried young mother as she stated that "the church at this point will not protect" the unmarried pregnant woman who "they feel have committed the worst sin on earth and so should be punished for it". She went further to narrate her experience of how her church dealt with an issue of unmarried pregnancy:

*I've had a case like this in my own church some time ago (...) this girl she was a victim of teenage pregnancy. It was not rape, it was a mutual agreement between her and the guy involved, [but] she was not married to this guy and she was quite young like 15-16 at that time. Somehow the church got to hear about it and they felt the best way they could handle it was to bring the girl to the pulpit (...) to condemn her. They wanted to bring her to the altar to show the church that she's pregnant, let her confess before the whole members of the congregation, that she has committed sin (...) but even at that stage I strongly stood against it because (...) this girl in question was related to me and when they held that meeting (...) I got to hear about it, I said it will not happen. That girl left [town] because of that thing (Chino, Pentecostal Church Member).*

Unlike Martha, Chino resisted such treatment but explained that she did so because the young woman was related to her. There is no evidence to suggest that Chino would have objected to the decisions of her church if the young woman involved was not her relation. Treatments like the ones mentioned by Martha and Chino explain why parents, particularly mothers, relocate their daughters who become pregnant outside of marriage. This option of relocation of the young woman becomes even more appealing to parents since they are unable to resist their church's ill-treatment of their daughter or themselves. Thus, they attempt to keep their integrity and maintain their loyalty to their church (not necessarily to God) by sending the young woman away.

It is important to note that both Chino and Martha expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction with their various churches during one-to-one interviews. The question therefore is whether they would express such views in some other forum. For instance, only one person from the 18 people who took part in 4 different focus group discussions spoke out against his church's attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and young mothers. In his words:

*I choose to differ from every of these my brothers. You know why? (...) part of them is Catholic and part of them is still entrenched in traditional views. The issue we have is our laws, our*

*religion, our procedures are made by men with the view point of man (...); they have never considered a woman* (Manny, Catholic Church Member).

Manny was very vocal in his criticism of the leadership structure of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations, particularly in their handling of cases of unmarried pregnancy. However, there was also no further evidence of his previous activism and protest on this area prior to the focus group discussion. In any case, his submission is that the leadership structure and doctrines of the Catholic Church perpetrates gender discrimination.

In this chapter, several participants (church/community members) expressed their concerns over the negative attitudes and actions of the church, family and other agents of socialisation towards unmarried mothers and premarital pregnancy in general. However, this study did not find evidence of activism towards the eradication of the socio-cultural and religious norms that are unfavourable to premarital pregnancy and to unmarried mothers. Although some churches and other non-governmental organisations work towards the amelioration of the challenges of unmarried mothers, members of these churches and organisations do not question the discourses that label and punish women in an event of premarital pregnancy. Across the three church denominations that took part in this study, findings did not indicate any actions from church members towards a cultural change with regard to premarital pregnancy and unmarried motherhood.

This study, like Ojo (2005), found instances in some Pentecostal churches where women are ordained pastors or women leaders either as individuals in their own right or because their spouse is a pastor. In such cases however, I uphold that women in such authoritative positions do not necessarily see things from a “woman’s” point of view or from the views of vulnerable women. A key question to Anglican and Pentecostal church women who are married to vicars and pastors respectively or those who are ordained pastors is whether they use their position to fight the cause of other women. Thus, women’s church leadership issues, especially in developing societies have been and remain a complex quagmire that spans beyond one church denomination.

A key phenomenon from the findings of this study is denial by church members, both clergy and laity, to take responsibility for their actions in terms of stigmatisation and general negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. In addressing lack of activism and denial as key themes that emerged from this project, I have identified various underlying discourses that are fundamentally linked to this denial and lack of activism. For instance the assumptions and understanding of submission is crucial to how individuals respond to certain events (see Burr 1995). My position is that within discourses that are built on submission of the weak to the powerful, individuals who are loyal

are likely to demonstrate their loyalty by taking positions that would not bring their submissiveness to question. In the case of attitudes of churches towards unmarried pregnancy, I argue that the majority of church members were reluctant to criticise their own church to ensure that their loyalty and ability to submit to their church remains unquestioned.

This failure to take responsibility and the blaming of everyone else but oneself, as stressed in Cohen (2001), remains a recurring trend within churches and between their members. In relation to dominant discourses, the element of expression of power in this recurring denial by churches is captured in Burr (1995) who suggested that discourses can operate to obscure the power operating in society. Burr went on to say that by taking on board particular discourses as ways of representing our experiences to ourselves; we are living under an illusion. As Cohen (2001) noted, individuals and groups tend to find ways of avoiding and evading uncomfortable realities, thus the existence of a culture of denial becomes functional in our world. To this end, I posit that a church is likely to endorse a stigmatisation discourse that portrays it as bereft of any wrongdoing, while apportioning every blame to other churches.

### **Chapter Summary**

As with the two previous data chapters, this chapter has drawn attention to various aspects of the theoretical underpinning of this thesis. For instance, it has identified and highlighted the impact of religious and socio-cultural discourses tailored along the lines heteronormativity, dualism, submission and stigma. This chapter has also established that when a case of unmarried pregnancy occurs in a church, there appears to be discrepancies between the reaction of the church clergy and laity. These different attitudes between the laity and the clergy are not restricted to one Christian denomination. There are significant variations in attitudes toward unmarried pregnancy even between churches of the same denomination. In the Catholic Church for instance, many of those who took part in this study directly implicated themselves by voicing negative attitudes or stigma towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried young mothers. More than half, while exempting themselves, simply looked at negative attitudes and stigmatisation of unmarried young mothers as an attitude expressed by “the church” and/or by some organisations within the church. Some went beyond their own church and blamed other churches. This was also the case with participants from other Christian denominations.

In this chapter, I have suggested that the main reason behind the variant attitudes and actions of the churches (Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostals) is generally because of their different theological and hierarchical structures. While this study did not set out to uncover theological differences and similarities between the denominations, it has signposted differences and similarities in their attitudes towards premarital sex, unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. The broader hierarchical

structure of Catholicism and Anglicanism acts as a minor protection; while things appear worse in Pentecostal churches that are largely independent. Thus, despite the rigidity and hierarchy of the Catholic and Anglican Church, there is relatively more oversight which although draconian, is somewhat consistent. To put it simply, the attitudes and actions you would find in one Catholic Church is not far removed from what you would find in another.

Catholics were the most criticised by other church denominations. Pentecostal churches took the least responsibility for negative attitudes towards unmarried mothers; thus, most participants who blamed other churches were members of Pentecostal churches. As is the case with the other two church denominations, lay members of the Anglican Church were at variance with their clergy on the attitudes of the ordinary members of the church towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. Away from the church leadership, findings uphold that lay members of the Anglican Church hold flexible views on premarital sex, contraception and abortion. However, the majority of these flexible views came from young members of the church in their early and mid-twenties. Going by the commentaries analysed in this chapter, there appears to be a significant level of flexibility on various aspects of the attitudes of Pentecostal churches towards premarital pregnancy and unmarried motherhood, when compared with the Catholic Church and Anglican. Perhaps, the hierarchical flexibility and increasing female participation (female pastors) found in Pentecostal churches is gradually trickling to the bottom of the church set-up. All through this chapter, there were several indications of church-based stigmatisation and negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. Yet, denial remains common, as individuals (both clergy and laity) make conscious efforts to avoid implicating and associating themselves with any form of stigmatisation and negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

This study set out to bring the experiences of young unmarried mothers, especially in developing patriarchal societies, to the fore of contemporary discussions and studies on premarital pregnancy and motherhood. It also aimed to incorporate the views of church/community members (clergy and laity) in the examination of the shared attitudes of society towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers and towards women in general. The decision to pursue this study stemmed from my conviction that premarital sex and the resultant premarital pregnancy has largely been researched from the point of view of mainstream societal norms. Thus, I set out to conduct this pro-feminist study to draw attention to the experiences of unmarried young women.

In line with the epistemological and empirical underpinnings of poststructuralist feminism, this thesis, through data collected qualitatively, has looked at societal attitudes towards various aspects of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It has identified and provided explanations and clarity on key issues and discourses that emanated from the data chapters. This thesis has also provided answers to its research questions, particularly in its three data chapters (chapters 4-6), as well as the questions originating from reviewed literature. While harmonising discussions on key issues that emanated from the findings of this study, this thesis has been able to relate the findings of this study to other relevant studies.

This concluding chapter commences with a review of the fundamental reasons behind my decision to conduct this study. It also reviews the aims this study set out to achieve and the reasons why I decided to set and pursue these aims. The second section revisits the literature, thereby stressing the key issues emanating from societal construction of premarital sex, sex education, contraception, abortion, as well as unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. The following section summarises the key findings from this research and their consequences when aligned with contemporary feminist literature, in terms of the place of women in developing patriarchal societies. The fourth section highlights implications of this study in terms of the contribution made to current knowledge by the thesis. This is followed by the last section which proposes directions for further research.

#### **Studying Unmarried Young Mothers in South-Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences**

This is the first time a study of this nature has been conducted within and outside the four local government councils that makeup Owerri, the capital city of Imo State, South-East Nigeria. Unlike previous studies such as Ankomah et al. (2011), Asonye, (2014), Mmari and Blum (2009) and Okereke

(2010a), this study simultaneously used narratives of young unmarried women and church/community members to explore the experiences of young unmarried mothers at the hands of their families, churches and other social institutions. As well as the attitudes of church/community members towards premarital sex and unmarried pregnancy, it also explored the effects of socio-cultural/biblical norms on the sexuality choices of young unmarried women in patriarchal societies such as the setting where this study was conducted.

While developed societies continue to experience and accumulate decades of active feminism and feminist research, the same cannot be said of developing societies such as Nigeria. Studies on gender and sexuality in developing patriarchal societies are hardly ever carried out from the point of view of the woman by pro-feminist researchers. In cases where such studies are conducted, they are rarely conducted by men, but for few exceptions such as Izugbara (2004a; 2008) and Lapierre (2007). With this knowledge and bearing in mind my understanding of the increasing challenges of unmarried motherhood, my resolve to conduct this study became stronger.

This study set out to investigate the range of attitudes of family and church/community members towards early unmarried pregnancy as well as the experiences of young unmarried mothers in South-East Nigeria.

The specific objectives were:

- ✓ To explore experiences of young mothers and prevailing attitudes towards unmarried teenage pregnancy and motherhood;
- ✓ To investigate whether family and church-based stigmatisation exists and if so, its effects on young unmarried mothers;
- ✓ To examine the nature of the sex education given to young women in South-Eastern Nigeria;
- ✓ To examine unmarried young mothers' knowledge about, access to and use of contraceptives and abortion practice.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated my resolve to achieve these objectives both in theory and in practical terms. Looking back at key aspects of literature and findings will help to buttress this point.

### **Revisiting the Literature on Various Aspects of Premarital Sex, Pregnancy and Motherhood**

The literature review section of this thesis took a critical look at relevant literatures on key issues emanating from societal construction of premarital sex, sex education, contraception and abortion as well as unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It raised various questions and drew conclusions on socio-cultural/religious discourses and societal construction of young women's sexuality. However, while sociological literature is awash with studies on premarital sex, sexuality education, contraception,

abortion as well as unmarried pregnancy, these studies scarcely look at young women and other members of the society concurrently. They also rarely focus on the developing world. Such studies either focused on young women or parents as separate target groups for separate studies. There is hardly evidence of studies that have attempted to look at the experiences of young women and at the same time look at the views and actions of other members of the society on the issue of premarital sex, pregnancy, and motherhood.

Furthermore, poststructuralist and pro-feminist literature is in short supply of studies conducted in highly religious patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. Although there is evidence that several studies (such as Aderibigbe et al. 2011; Amadi et al. 2001; Amobi and Igwebge 2004) have been conducted on young women's sexuality issues in Nigeria, the majority of such studies are primarily fixated on exploring causes of premarital sex and premarital pregnancy from the point of view of societal norms and dominant discourses. For studies that have looked at contraceptive use or abortion practice, the majority of them looked at their prevalence in terms of numbers.

In line with findings from studies such as Izugbara (2004a) and Okonofual et al. (2011), this study holds that sex, sex education, contraception and abortion in Nigeria are all constructed to support and perpetuate heteronormative discourses and rigid patriarchal socio-cultural and religious norms. Thus, this construction and the discourses emanating from it are the root cause of premarital pregnancy in Nigeria. This study upholds that in societies where dominant discourses on young women's sexuality are constructed by dominant social groups; such discourses are hardly favourable to women, especially young unmarried women. Religion and sexuality studies in such societies fail to question existing socio-cultural and religious norms. Most of such studies also fail to seek the views of young unmarried women themselves. This study has questioned the construction of motherhood, especially in developing societies. Following its own findings as well as findings from studies such as Agunbiade et al. (2009) and Onyeocha (2014), this study posits that the construction of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood is detrimental to the socio-economic progress of young unmarried women. It holds that one consequence of societal perception of premarital pregnancy and unmarried motherhood is that young unmarried mothers do not have the same life opportunities available to other young women. It posits that the construction of premarital motherhood as an act of defiance, (which is not the case with premarital fatherhood), shows the depth of hegemonic masculinity in the Nigeria society.

A key concern of social science scholars is being able to successfully apply Western theories on studies conducted in developing societies. While I acknowledge this to be a concern that I harboured from the beginning of this study, I also admit that the importance of using these theoretical frameworks cannot be overemphasised, because these frameworks facilitate the understanding of socio-cultural events in developing societies. As I reflect on how I have made use of these theories throughout this thesis, I admit that the success of this study hinges largely on the applicability of such theories. Having

reviewed several literatures on poststructuralist feminist perspectives from religion, gender and sexuality scholars, it is evident that these theories provide a blueprint for scholars to successfully conduct various studies in variant societies. Simply put, applying Western theories in studies conducted in developing societies, such as my research setting does not jeopardise the research process, neither does it deface the authenticity of such theories. Studies such as mine enhances these Western theories and vice versa. For instance, Foucault's (1976) "History of Sexuality" provided this thesis with a platform to examine the impact of society's religion and power discourses, on the sexual decisions and choices of individuals. Butler's (1999, 2004) idea of gender also facilitated my conceptualisation of gender and heteronormativity in this thesis. Another example is Goffman's (1963) notion of stigma; it provided space for the examination of the attitudes and actions of individuals and social institutions towards unmarried mothers and unmarried pregnancy.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

In relation to the key findings of this study, I commence this section of the final chapter of this thesis by summarising the key issues uncovered by the data chapters. In Chapter Four for instance, significant themes such as such as young women's sexual activities, friendship/love sexual consent, sexual coercion (rape), sex education, contraception and abortion were investigated. In doing so and in line with poststructuralist feminist epistemologies, there was evidential identification and integration of these themes into prevailing discourses identified to be actively in operation in various Nigerian church communities studied here. To this end, Chapter Four looked at various discourses, particularly those pertaining to repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity and romantic love, as well as assumptions about male sexual drive and understanding of rape.

Chapter Five explored stigma not just as a theoretical concept but as a fundamental and practical aspect of discourse used to manage stigmatised identities. It also investigated how various aspects of stigma that become key parts of everyday discourse are facilitated by higher level discourses that are entrenched in gendered socio-economic and heteronormative beliefs emanating from culture and religion. The chapter used the narratives of young unmarried women in exploring their stigmatisation by individuals and groups within their local communities. In doing so, the chapter explored the lived experiences of young unmarried women, particularly in terms of the various forms of stigma they face in the hands of key social institutions such as schools, churches and families. In relation to the idea of felt and enacted stigma, Chapter Five examined how these young unmarried women and sometimes their families deal with the fear of their impending stigmatisation as well as how they respond to their actual experience of stigmatisation.

Chapter Six looked at the attitudes of various churches towards premarital sex, sex education, contraception, abortion and other aspects of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood. It also looked at the denial of responsibility by individuals (laity and clergy) and church groups as well as activism of individuals and groups or lack of it. It explored the reasons behind these denials and lack of activism and situated these reasons within discourses identified to be in operation in the study setting, the majority of which will be discussed here.

I reiterate therefore that the three previous chapters of this thesis have made a clear presentation of the empirical findings of this study from a poststructuralist feminist standpoint. They have also discussed these findings and located them within the existing literature and discourses in the fields of religion, sexuality, gender, and power relations. Within these three data chapters, I have identified and looked at discourses such as those relating to stigma, repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity, assumptions about male sexual drive, framing of submission, as well as other socio-cultural and religious binary opposite discourses. In this research project, I found issues pertaining to premarital sex, sex education, contraception, unmarried pregnancy and other related subjects in the research setting to be embedded in these dominant discourses entrenched in gendered heteronormative religious and socio-cultural dualism. As this thesis has shown, the binary understanding of religion is apparent in Nigeria. Therefore, the discourses that emerged from the three data chapters 4-6 such as repressive sex education, sexual activity, male sexual drive and submission all feed into the higher-order discourse of heteronormativity – where men remain in control to perpetuate a heterosexual gendered ordering. Stigma discourses are then constructed to check and punish those who are perceived to have stepped out of this gendered ordering. As a vital part of my key findings, I have revisited these discourses in the paragraphs below.

From my findings, there is ample evidence that the practice of religion in Nigeria largely follows the position of theorists of religion such as Douglas (1966) and Durkheim (1912/1995) who viewed religious beliefs and practices from a binary opposition standpoint. For example, while highlighting the importance of these dichotomies, Durkheim looked at religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (Durkheim 1995). This veneration of humans, object, symbols and other things that are perceived as sacred is a key aspect of the trajectory of worship amongst Christians in South-East Nigeria. For instance my interviews with members of the Catholic Church highlighted the significance of the Mary League Association, the Virgin Mary, and even the uniform of the Catholic Women Association. Both theorists held that in faith circles, human behaviours, activities and choices are largely interpreted along the lines of the dual concept of sacred/profane and purity/danger and as such, the relationship between society and religion is said to be largely built around the observance and sustenance of this dichotomy (see Douglas 1966 and Durkheim 1912/1995). Not only did my findings

capture this in operation in my research setting, I have also provided evidence of how society uses religious institutions (churches) to observe and sustain these dichotomies in practical terms.

Some participants from all the churches who took part in my study saw a young woman's ability to preserve her virginity until marriage as an important way for her to profess her faith. I argue that this emphasis on virginity is one of the many ways society preserves its unfair heteronormative values within socio-cultural and religious institutions. A vital message of Douglas and Durkheim is that in religious institutions such as churches, religious injunctions, rewards and punishments are tailored towards the observance and maintenance of heteronormativity (see Butler 1999 and Jackson 2005) as well as the dichotomy between sacredness/profanity and purity/danger (see Douglas 1966 and Durkheim 1912/1995). The narratives of participants who took part in my study (clergy and laity) broadly shared this position. Throughout this thesis, I have argued from a poststructuralist feminist standpoint; stressing that these binary opposite narratives are used for the perpetuation of patriarchy and social inequality. I have maintained that in the course of maintaining the distinction between these dichotomies, religious institutions humiliate and stigmatise their weakest members.

Although the attention of Douglas and Durkheim is not on the social status allocated to the social groups and gender that occupy the pure and dangerous positions or sacred and profane positions respectively (see Durkheim 1912/1995; Eliade 1958; Douglas 1966), this cannot be said about the findings of my study. I found that pursuance of the binary opposite narrative in relation to premarital sex and unmarried pregnancy is gendered. Unlike the majority of my participants, Douglas and Durkheim did not emphasise in gender terms who society classifies as pure and those it classifies as dangerous. Here, I borrow the words of Douglas and Durkheim, to reiterate that my study offers evidence that religious institutions in Nigerian societies classify women as profane and dangerous while men are largely viewed as sacred and pure in relation to matters of sexual nature. Similarly, Furlong (1988) noted that women are defined in dangerous terms when they seek equal positions in religious circles. The feminist Christians who took part in Aune's 2014 UK study also stressed that women are treated as subordinates in religious institutions.

With regards to the notion of dualism, religion, (in this case Christianity) has for many years enshrined these dichotomies as a tool for the control of human behaviour (see Foucault 1976). With virtually every social issue viewed in binary terms of good versus bad, sacred versus profane, purity versus danger, man versus woman, and boy versus girl, the faith communities that took part in this study view premarital sex as bad profanity which poses some form of danger to society's individuals and institutions. In a similar manner, such discourses view unmarried young mothers and women in general as bad and profanely dangerous.

The findings of this study have affirmed the concerns of several poststructuralist feminists and sociology of religion scholars such as Arnal and McCutcheon (2013); Bowie (2000); Northup (1997); Page (2010); Stronge (2006), on the dangers of the notion of binary opposition in faith communities. The consensus between this study and the views of these scholars is that these dichotomies are part of the same ordering scheme set up to augment and perpetuate patriarchal views. It is true that the society operates in stark binary terms such that goodness and badness is allocated to different bodies. However, unmarried pregnancy may well be a way of challenging these binaries. For instance, some unmarried mothers who took part in this study showed some level of resistance by deciding not to continue attending church services because of the negative reception they would receive. A few others also decided to reject the tag of “bad example” by continuing to attend church services after childbirth, irrespective of the negative attitudes of other church members. This is also viewed here as a show of agency on the part of these young women. Their resistance makes a strong case for the need not to ignore the importance and impact of lived experiences of the individual, as noted in McGuire (2011). While these dichotomies might have their positive uses as some of my participants noted, I argue that it falls short of explaining the complexities of everyday life.

Following my identification of the polarisation of society in binary terms as a key discourse framed by those in position of authority, I also saw that this notion of dualism is intrinsically linked to heteronormativity and other discourses such as repressive sex education, understanding of sexual activity, assumptions about male sexual drive, framing of the of submission. For instance, this study provides evidence to suggest that socio-cultural and religious demand for virginity facilitates a sex education discourse that is largely repressive; and an undersigning of sexual activity and rape that is historically beneficial to men.

With the establishment of the notion of dualism as a key discourse in operation in Nigeria, I also looked at how this discourse impacts the notion of submission; another discourse that is largely shared in my research setting. In fact, there are obvious elements of this notion of submission in practically every one of my three data chapters. I situate the widespread submission discourse in my study setting within the gendered unequal distribution of socio-economic and religious power prevalent in Nigerian societies. Burr (1995) and Foucault (1976) also linked the submission discourse with power. For instance, I call to mind Burr’s (1995) argument that the representation of people as free individuals, as masculine and/or as well educated can serve to support power inequalities between them, while passing such inequalities as fair or somehow natural. In relation to my study, this notion was evident; and a good example of its impact is how young women conceptualised rape and sexual activity. In Chapter Four, I looked at how young women who were raped used words like “forced sex” rather than rape to describe their experience. On the basis of the submission discourse, there were also young women who

submitted to their partner's aggressive sexual demands mainly because they had received some form of financial help from their partner.

Burr's concept as well as Butler's notion of gender performativity also explains why women leaders in church (including wives of pastors) accept and sometimes initiate the stigmatisation of women who become pregnant outside of marriage and not the men. These participants recounted a popular story in the Bible where only the woman caught in adultery was brought out to be "stoned" while her partner was neither mentioned nor punished. Rather than criticising such practices, these women voiced that this is the order of things; the way it has always been, thus they believe that changing this world order should not be the woman's business. It should be needless to stress that a poststructuralist feminist study, such as mine would fervently disagree with this notion of world order maintenance. Similar to Burr's theorisation, I found in this study that using religious and cultural tools, patriarchal societies have historically succeeded in imbedding not only heterosexuality, but also various forms of inequalities into the fabrics of our society, to the point that those who are unfairly treated consider their ill-treatment as natural.

In line with Foucault's conceptualisation of Power and Burr's analogy (see Burr 1995 and Foucault 1976), my study findings have unveiled that a Christian woman in Nigeria (married and unmarried), is expected to be submissive to her husband or partner. This narrative which has now been constructed into society's hegemonic masculinity norms requires women to be unreservedly submissive. It also ensures the ad-judgment of those who do not adhere to these norms as deviants. With active patriarchal norms in place, this notion of submission becomes embedded into a religious discourse, framed on the basis of the sacred versus the profane, man versus woman, and good versus bad, with women predominantly the occupiers of the position of profanity. Going by the findings of this study, women who name and shame those who become pregnant outside of marriage are advocates of these heteronormative submission discourses and binary opposite discourses. This set of Christian women are viewed here as those who are unable to reconcile the biblical teachings of forgiveness/being one's "brother's keeper", with the socio-cultural demands/expectation of these discourses that are framed around submission and femininity/virginity.

Another key finding of this project is that against the backdrop of its many other unfair discourses, communities in my research setting develop discourses around stigma, to punish those believed to have embarked on sexual activities and child bearing outside of marriage. The stigma discourse is also used as a tool to discourage and reprimand those who might want to embark on any form of premarital sexual activity. It stretches far enough to ensure that through various forms of stigmatisation, powerful



individuals and social institutions ensure that those in no position of power remain submissive. To this end, I link my findings on stigma with the foundation laid by Goffman (1963) more because evidence from my study upholds Goffman's position that society constructs a stigma theory as an ideology to explain an individual's inferiority and to account for the danger that individual represents. Goffman argued that society attempts to rationalise animosity on this basis. Goffman's views to a large extent provide a platform for unpacking the various narratives of stigmatisation found in this study.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two, I highlighted society's use of the family, the church and other social institutions as tools for initiating a system of control of young people's sexuality (Foucault 1976; Gordon 1980), as well as their use of the concept of stigma (Goffman 1963); my findings in chapters 4-6 support this initial position. Society constructs a stigmatisation discourse which it sets aside for the punishment of young women and in some cases the mothers of these young women who they believe have gone against the demands of other dominant discourses mentioned above. To put it simply, this study found stigmatisation of an unmarried young mother as a common societal response towards premarital sex and unmarried motherhood. Society perceives unmarried young mothers as violators of the rules of the sexuality discourse who must be punished. Such punishments in most cases are facilitated through the family and other primary agents of socialisation such as churches and schools. Going by the findings of this study, I agree with Riddick (2000), that the cultural context in which these labels and stigmas are being applied (in this case the family and church) increases the level of felt and enacted stigma as defined in Chapter One. Such stigmas also come with a huge level of uncertainty, such that in the stigmatised person arises the sense of not knowing what others really think about her or what category she will be placed and if such a category will at any point become favourable (see Goffman 1963).

In general, this study observed that all discourses on female sexuality remain an unequal encounter dominated by the male gender to the detriment of women of all ages. Whilst Foucault (1976) and Gordon (1980) had previously theorised and warned about tools of social control used by agents of socialisation to control the sexual activities of young people; this study found such tools and techniques to include: back benching, name calling, gossiping, shunning, expulsion and labelling; the majority of which falls under Goffman's (1963) notion of stigma. As these punishments are focused on women, the lack of men and women's willingness to accept the blame remains a cause for concern for feminist activists (see Caplan 1998; Jackson and Mannix 2004; Lapierre 2007; Singh 2004). Even more worrying is women's acceptance of such blames, not only in developing societies as this study found, but also in developed societies as Lapierre (2007) found in his study. As highlighted in Lapierre (2007), it is hardly surprising that abused women express feelings of guilt and self-blame, given the pervasiveness of mother-blaming and women's overwhelming sense of responsibility in regard to their

children, their strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be perceived as such. I argue that this submission and acceptance of responsibility is one of the many products of the countless discourses found in various societies, most of which disempower women of all ages.

Having critically weighed available literature on various aspects of this study against my chosen theoretical underpinnings, the effect of discourse is situated here as a defining factor of the summary of key findings of this study. The majority of reasons given by members of the society (church/community members) blame young unmarried women for early sexual activity. Personal experiences of young unmarried mothers gathered from their narratives refute these claims and point to failings of society and its agents of socialisation as the root cause early sexual activity. While the argument may continue beyond this thesis, it is important to note that this study believes that the levels of unmarried young women's sexuality education, their knowledge, access and use of contraceptives are low. This study also argues that agents of socialisation charged with the responsibility of delivering such education and facilities, are responsible for this poor delivery, not young women. In fact, young women are victims and not the villains society paints them. I acknowledge, however, that some of these young women have demonstrated some level of agency and resistance in some instances, by withdrawing from church activities or by refusing to stop attending.

This study holds that society uses its key agents of socialisation (family and church) to demands virginity and early marriage from young unmarried women. Their message is that women must be mothers, but only after marriage. Thus, society uses the same agents of socialisation to punish and stigmatise those who become pregnant outside of marriage. This study also holds that unmarried pregnant teenagers constantly face various forms of punishment and stigmatisation as well as fear of being punished and stigmatised. Evidence from this study upholds that in anticipation of negative reaction from mainstream society and its institutions such as the church, families react negatively towards premarital pregnancy. It is believed that a family's negative reaction stems from its desire to positively portrayed and protect its image in other bigger social groupings such as the church.

In an event of premarital pregnancy, the church also takes various measures (see chapters 4, 5 and 6) in attempt to protect its image. Across different church denominations, there is significant discrepancy in the reaction of the clergy and laity when a case of unmarried pregnancy occurs in a church. Similarly, the attitudes of the church towards unmarried pregnancy between churches of the same denomination also vary significantly. Denial is a common phenomenon with all churches, such that every church eagerly points out negative attitudes and actions of other church denominations towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers.

As previously mentioned, the fundamental summary of the findings of this study is that the overall experiences of young unmarried mothers and the attitudes of society toward unmarried pregnancy are all products of dominant discourses. These discourses are constructed along the lines of patriarchy and religious norms. The overbearing place occupied by patriarchy is the main reason why men do not face the challenges faced by women. Although young unmarried fathers were not interviewed in this study, there is no evidence in this thesis to suggest that they face similar challenges to those faced by unmarried young mothers. Thus, I posit that in virtually every Nigerian setting, especially in socio-cultural and religious circles, sex is constructed for the benefit of men and to the detriment of women.

### **Implications**

The implications of the findings of this study are based on the experiences of young unmarried mothers and the attitudes of society (family and church/community members) towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers. With regards to the experiences of young unmarried mothers, this study has generated a chronological insight into the everyday experiences of young unmarried women on issues relating to sex. It has shown a common pattern of events, commencing with the inadequate/ sex education of a young woman until the time she becomes an unmarried mother. It has brought to the fore the covert and overt reasons behind young women's early sexual initiation. It has shown that although several factors are responsible for young women's early sexual activity, the majority of these factors are outside of the control of young women themselves.

In relation to the attitudes and actions of society towards premarital pregnancy, this study has shown that society through its agents of socialisation does not only fail to provide young women adequate sexuality education, it also fails to accept responsibility for its failings. In an event of premarital pregnancy, society assumes the position of the aggrieved. This study has therefore shown why, how and the extent to which society uses its agents of social control to punish those who it believes are deviating from its norms. This study upholds that the attitudes and negative actions of society as expressed through the family, the church and schools towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers are biased and unjustifiable.

Another implication of this study is that it has given insight into the nature of the sex education provided in families, churches and other agents of socialisation. Following this insight, the shared experiences of young unmarried mothers who took part in this study could perhaps inspire discussions in families, communities, churches and other social groups towards the eradication of cultural and religious practices and beliefs that facilitate the sexual abuse of young women. This study has also drawn attention to the extent to which patriarchal ideologies ensure that women are, and remain at the receiving end of every adversity that emanates from heterosexual sex discourses. It has raised awareness about some women's tendency (especially those in leadership positions in churches) to embrace gendered discourses that do not benefit women at large. This study has been able to make it

abundantly clear that in Owerri, South-East Nigeria, as well as in many other similar societies, religious and cultural beliefs facilitate discourses that perpetuate gender inequality. To this end, a key implication of this study is its capacity to stimulate and facilitate a sexuality discourse that is free of gender bias.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Following the findings of this study, it is clear that young unmarried women in Nigeria do not receive adequate sexuality education, thus they face several sexuality challenges from adolescence to adulthood. It is also clear that families, churches and other agents of socialisation express negative attitudes towards premarital sex, premarital pregnancy, and unmarried motherhood. Against this backdrop, I have made the following recommendations:

- ✓ There is a need for government and agents of socialisation especially the church, the family and schools to deliver comprehensive sexuality education to young people, especially young women.
- ✓ Local and international governments and non-governmental agencies should embark on reorientation campaigns with the aim of eradicating culture and religion-based stigmatisation, and all negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and unmarried mothers.
- ✓ A women-led sensitisation campaign to inform women, especially those in patriarchal developing societies such as Nigeria, on the need for them to resist patriarchy and embrace contemporary discourses on gender equality should be launched.
- ✓ A government sponsored support program aimed at educating and empowering unmarried young mothers and their children to enable them to attain their full capacities is needed.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

- ✓ Taking the findings of this study as a stepping stone, wider studies involving larger number of unmarried mothers and churches are needed.
- ✓ Some of the unmarried mothers interviewed in this study who were raped, explained their rape as “forced sex”. Further research is needed in this area, particularly in relation to the definition of sexual consent and rape.

- ✓ In line with the findings of this study, a study on unmarried fathers in a developing, religious patriarchal society is needed to fully explore their heterosexual journey from adolescence to adulthood and their experience of unmarried fatherhood.
- ✓ This study specifically focused on Christianity and looked at its three main denominations; similar studies are needed in different socio-cultural and religious communities such as Islam.
- ✓ Having conducted this study from the point of view of young unmarried mothers, findings from this study have underscored the need for more studies that involve vulnerable participants, to be conducted from the point of view of such participants.
- ✓ In sociological literature, empirical studies on women, especially those relating to sexuality and gender are usually conducted by female scholars. This trend draws attention to my position as a pro-feminist man researching young women's experiences of unmarried pregnancy and motherhood in a patriarchal society. However, this study suggests that pro-feminist men are capable of nurturing an awareness and knowledge in relation to women's oppression and can contribute to the development of a feminist standpoint. Thus, I recommend that pro-feminist men equipped with appropriate epistemological and empirical frameworks should conduct similar studies thereby ensuring that women in all societies are not treated unfairly in comparison to men on the basis of gender or on any other basis.

## REFERENCES

- Abercrombie, N., Hill, S. and Turner, B.S. (1988). *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*. London: Penguin Group.
- Adepoju, A. (2005). Sexuality Education in Nigeria: Evolution, Challenges and Prospects. *African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre*. Available at [http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/adepoju\\_sexed.pdf](http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/adepoju_sexed.pdf) Accessed 20/10/2015.
- Aderibigbe, S., Araoye, M., Akande, T., Musa, O., Monehin, J., and Babatunde, O. (2011). Teenage Pregnancy and Prevalence of Abortion among In-school Adolescents in Northern Nigeria. *Asian Social Science* Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 122-127.
- Adogame, A., Chitando, E., and Bateye, B. (2013). *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Agbalajobi, D., T. (2010). Women's Participation and the Political Process in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* Vol. 4, No.2, pp. 075-082.
- Agunbiade, M., Ayotunde, T., and Mustapha, O. (2009). Pregnancy Stigmatisation and Coping Strategies of Adolescent Mothers in Two Yoruba Communities, SouthWestern Nigeria. Available at: <http://iussp2009.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=92893> Accessed 14/07/2014.
- Ako-Nai, R. I. (2013). *Gender and Power Relations in Nigeria*. Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Allanana, M. G. (2013). Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward. *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.9, No.17.
- Amadi, A. N., Aluka, C., Kamanu, C. I. and Njoku, O. O. (2001). Teenage Pregnancy and Obstetrics Complications in Aba/Nigeria. *JOMIP*, Vol. 2, pp. 52.
- Amobi, I., and Igwegbe, A. (2004). Unintended Pregnancy among Unmarried Adolescents and Young Women in Anambra State, South East Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 92-102.
- Ankomah, A., Mamman-Daura, F., Omoregie, G., and Anyanti, J. (2011). Reasons for Delaying or Engaging in Early Sexual Initiation among Adolescents in Nigeria. *Adolescent Health Medicine and Therapeutics*, Vol. 2, pp. 75-84.

- Arai, L. (2009). *Teenage Pregnancy: The Making and Unmaking of a Problem*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Arnal, W. E. and McCutcheon, S.T. (2013). *The Sacred is The Profane: The Political Nature of Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Asonye, P. N. (2014). *Experiences and Perceptions of Pregnant Unmarried Adolescents in Nigeria*, Walden University: PhD Research Thesis.
- Aune, K. (2002). *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?* Cumbria: Paternoster Press.
- Aune, K. (2014). Feminist Spirituality as Lived Religion: How UK Feminists Forge Religio-spiritual Lives. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 122–145.
- Baber, K. M. (1994). Studying Women's Sexualities: Feminist Transformations. In Sollie, D. L. and Leslie, L.A. (Eds.), *Gender, Families, and Close Relationships: Feminist Research Journeys*, California: Sage Publication.
- Bankole, A., and Malarcher, S. (2010). Removing Barriers to Adolescents' Access to Contraceptive Information and Services. *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 117-124.
- Bastien, S., Kajula, L.J., and Muhwezi, W.W. (2011). A Review of Studies of Parent-Child Communication about Sexuality and HIV/AIDS In Sub-Saharan Africa. *Reproductive Health Journal* Vol. 8, No. 25. Available at: <http://www.reproductivehealthjournal.com/content/8/1/25>. Accessed 12/08/2014.
- Bell, J. (2000). *Doing your Research Project: A guide for First-time Researchers in Education and Social science*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Boucher, G. (2006). The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler. *Parrhesia*, No. 1, pp. 112 – 141.
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 19, No. 19. Pp. 1-9.
- Bowie, F. (2000). *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Braithwaite, D., O and Baxter, L., A. (2006). *Engaging Theories in Family Communication: Multiple Perspectives*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77-101.

- Brecher, E. M. (1969). *The Sex Researchers*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.
- Brickell, C. (2006). *The Sociological Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited.
- Bryson, V. (1999). *Feminist Debates: Issues of Theory and Political Practice*. New York: New York University Press.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Caplan, P.J. (1998). Mother-blaming. In Ladd-Taylor, M. and Urnansky, L. (Eds.), *'Bad' Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. and Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative Marketing Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cater, S. and Coleman, L. (2006). Planned Teenage Pregnancy: Views and Experiences of Young People from Poor and Disadvantaged Backgrounds. Available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/planned-teenage-pregnancy-views-and-experiences-young-people-poor-and-disadvantaged-bac>.
- Chambers, R., Wakely, G. and Chamber, S. (2001). *Tackling Teenage Pregnancy: Sex, Culture and needs*. Oxon: Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd.
- Chapin, R. (2011). *Social Policy for Effective Practice: A Strengths Approach*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Chase, S. E. and Rogers, M.F. (2001). *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Cornwall, A. (2002). Spending Power: Love, Money, and the Recsonfiguration of Gender Relations in Ado-Odo, SouthWestern Nigeria. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 963-980.
- Cornwell, A., and Welbourn, A. (2000). From Reproduction to Rights: Participatory Approaches to Sexual and Reproductive Health. *PLA Notes*, Vol. 37, pp. 14-21.



- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. Choosing among five Approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Desai, G. (2000). *Queer Theory and Alternative Sexualities*. Paper presented at Seminar Series on Homosexuality in African Literary Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage.
- Dickson-Swift, V., James, E. L., Kippen, S., and Liamputtong, P., (2008). Risk to Researchers in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics: Issues and Strategies. *Qualitative Health Research* Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 133-144.
- Digby, T. (1998). *Men Doing Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Douglas, M. (1966/2007). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dumbili, E. W. (2016). Gendered Sexual Uses of Alcohol and Associated Risks: A Qualitative Study of Nigerian University Students. *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 16, No. 476, pp. 1-11.
- Duncan, S. (2007). What's the Problem with Teenage Parents? And what's the Problem with Policy? *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 307 – 334.
- Durkheim, E. (1912/1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by K. E. Fields. New York: The Free Press.
- Edwards, R and Ribbens, J (1998). *Living on the Edges: Public Knowledge, Private Lives, Personal Experiences*. In Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. (Eds), *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, pp. 1-23. London: Sage.
- Egan, D. R. (2013). *Becoming Sexual: A Critical Appraisal of the Sexualisation of Girls*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Eliade, M. (1957). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by W. R. Trask. New York: Harcourt.
- Eliss, H. (1936). *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. New York: Random House.
- England, K. V.L. (1994). Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research. *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 80-91.
- Essien, A. M. and Bassey, A. A. (2012). The Social and Religious Challenges of Single Mothers in Nigeria. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, Vol.2, No. 4. Pp. 240-251.

- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2015). *Language and Power*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Routledge.
- Fereday, J. and Eimear, M. (2006). Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 1-11.
- Findolini, V. (2014). When Religion Reshapes Identities: Young Moroccan Adults, Sexual Behaviour and Islamic Modernities. In Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (Eds.), *Queer Religion and Religious Queer*. New York: Routledge.
- Fine, M. (1993). Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire. In Weis, L. and Fine, M. (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: Class, Race, and Gender, in United States schools*. New York: Suny.
- Fomby, P. and Cherlin, A. J. (2007). Family Instability and Child Well-Being. *National Institute of Health*, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 181–204.
- Fonda, M., Eni, R., and Guimond, E. (2013). Socially Constructed Teen Motherhood: A Review. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, Vol. 4, No.1, pp. 1-14.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality (Vol. 1: An Introduction)*. New York: Pantheon.
- Friend, R. A. (1993). Choices, not Closets: Heterosexism and Homophobia in Schools. In Weis, L. and Fine, M. (Eds.), *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender, in United States schools*. New York: Suny.
- Frye, M. (1990). The Possibility of Feminist Theory. In Rhode, D.L. (Ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, pp. 174-184. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Furlong, M. (1988). *Introduction' in Furlong, M. (Ed), Mirror to the Church: Reflections on Sexism*, London: SPCK.
- Garwood, P., Jennings, D., Skeates, R. and Toms, J. (1989). *Sacred and Profane: Proceedings of a Conference on Archaeology, Ritual and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2002). *Qualitative Data Analysis: Explorations with NVivo*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Giddens, A., and Sutton, P. W. (2013). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Given, L. M. (2008). The Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods. Available at:  
<http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/sage-encyc-qualitative-research-methods/n334.xml>.  
 Accessed 02/10/2014
- Global Christianity (2011). Regional Distribution of Christians. Available at:  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-regions/>. Accessed 02/10/2014.
- Gordon, C. (1980). *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge*. Herefordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Green, G., Hayes, G., Dickinson, D., Gilheany, B. and Whittaker, A. (2003). A Mental Health Service Users' Perspective to Stigmatization. *Journal of Mental Health* Vol. 12, pp. 223-234.
- Gregory, A. (2007). Can we Promote Child Well-Being by Promoting Marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 69, No. 5, pp. 1326-1344.
- Griffith, R. M. (1997a). Submissive Wives, Wounded Daughters, and Female Soldiers: Prayer and Christian Womanhood in Women's Aglow Fellowship, In Hall, D. D. (Ed.), *Lived Religion in America Toward a History of Practice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving usefulness of Results through Responsive and Naturalistic Approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hall, D. D. (1997). *Lived religion In America: Toward a History of Practice*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hammersley, M. (1993). *Social Research Philosophy, Politics and Practice* London: Sage.
- Harcourt, B. E. (2007). An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Poststructuralism?' *University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper*, No. 156, PP. 1 – 34.
- Harvey, G. (2013). *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Hearn, J. (1992). The Personal, the Political, the Theoretical: The Case of Men's Sexualities and Sexual Violences. In Porter, D.L. (Ed.), *Between Men and Feminism*, pp. 161-181. London: Routledge.
- Hearn, J. (2015). *Men of the World: Genders, Globalisations, Transnational Times*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Heath, S. (1987). Male Feminism. In Jardine, A. and Smith, P. (Eds.), *Men in Feminism*. London: Routledge.

- Hesse-Biber, S. N. and Leavy, P. (2010). *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hollos, M., and Whitehouse, B. (2008). (In) Fertility and the Modern Female Life Course in two Southern Nigerian Communities. *Ethnology*, Vol. 47, No.1, pp. 23-43.
- Holmgren, L. E. (2011). Cofielding in Qualitative Interviews: Gender, Knowledge, and Interaction in a Study of (Pro) Feminist Men. *Qualitative Enquiry* Vol.17, No. 4 pp. 364-378.
- Howarth, D. (2013). *Poststructuralism and After*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howson, A. (2005). *Embodying Gender*. London: Sage.
- Huaynoca, S., Chandra-Mouli, V.,Yaqub Jr, N. and Denno, D. (2014). Scaling up Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Nigeria: From National Policy to Nationwide Application, *Sex Education*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 191-209.
- Idyorough, A. E. (2005). *Gender: Concepts and Issues in Nigeria*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- Isherwood, L. (2004). Learning to be a Woman: Feminist Theological Reflections on Sex Education in Church Schools'. *Sex Education*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 273-284.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2004a). The Socio-Cultural Context of Adolescents' Notion of Sex and Sexuality in Rural South-Eastern Nigeria. *Sexualities*, Vol. 8, No.5, pp. 600-617.
- Izugbara, C.O. (2004b). Patriarchal Ideology and Discourses of Sexuality in Nigeria. *African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre*. Available at:<http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/izugbara.pdf> . Assessed 20/10/2015.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2008). Home-Based Sexuality Education: Nigerian Parents Discussing Sex With Their Children. *Sage Publication*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 575-600.
- Jackson, S. (2006). Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and limits) of Heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory*, vol. 7, No.1, pp. 105-121.
- Jackson, D. and Mannix, J. (2004). Giving voice to the Burden of Blame: A Feminist Study of Mothers' Experiences of Mother Blaming. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, Vol.10, pp. 150-158.
- Jardine, A. and Smith, P. (1987). *Men in Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Jekayinfa, A. A. (1999). The Role of Nigerian Women in Culture and National Development. *Journal of Educational Theory and Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 1&2.

- Johnson, A. G. (2000). *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jewel, D., Tacchi, J. and Donovan, J. (2000). Teenage Pregnancy: whose problem is it? *Oxford Journal of Medicine and Family Practice*, Vol. 17, No. 6, PP. 522-528.
- Juschka, D. M. (2001). *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, London: The Tower Building.
- Karandashev, V. (2015). A Cultural Perspective on Romantic Love. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 4.
- Kelly, L, Burton, S and Regan, L. (1994). Researching women's lives or studying women's oppression? Reflections on what constitutes feminist research. In Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Kimmel, M.S. (1998). *Who's afraid of Men Doing Feminism?* In Digby, T. (Ed), *Men Doing Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Krieken, K. V. (2017). Ambiguous Perspective in Narrative Discourse: Effects of Viewpoint Markers and Verb Tense on Readers' Interpretation of Represented Perceptions, Discourse Processes  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2017.1381540>.
- Kukla, A. (2000). *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science*. London: Routledge.
- Kumar, R. (2005). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: SAGE publications Ltd.
- Lamina, M. A. (2015). Prevalence of Abortion and Contraceptive Practice among Women Seeking Repeat Induced Abortion in Western Nigeria. *Journal of Pregnancy*. Vol. 2015, No. 486203, pp. 1-8.
- Lapierre, S. (2007). *Taking the Blame: Women's Experiences of Mothering in the Context of Domestic Violence*. PhD Thesis, University of Warwick.
- Layder, D. (1994). *Understanding Social Theory*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Levy, D. (2006). Qualitative Methodology and Ground Theory in Property Research. *Pacific Rim Property Research Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 369-388.
- Lowe, P. (2016). *Reproductive Health and Maternal Sacrifice: Women, Choice and Responsibility*. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

- Makinwa-Adebusoye, P., Singh, S., and Audam, S., (1997). Nigerian Health Professionals' Perceptions about Abortion Practice. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 155-161
- Maliki, A. E. (2012). The Effect of Teenage Pregnancy on Adolescents in Amassoma Community of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 62-66.
- Maltz, D. and Borker, R. (1982). A Cultural Approach to Male-female Miscommunication, In Gumperz, J. J. (Ed.), *Language and Social Identity*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mauthner, M. and Doucet, A. (1998). Reflections on a Voice-centred Relational Method: Analysing Maternal and Domestic Voices. In Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. (Eds.), *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, pp. 119-146. London: Sage.
- May, T. (2005). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. New York: Two Penn Plaza.
- May, V. (2013). What is Narrative Analysis? Available at: <http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/events/whatis/narrativeanalysis.pdf>, Accessed 05/08/2013.
- McGuire, M. B. (2011). *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Milford, C. (1994). *Vision for the Future: The Symbol of Woman*. In Walrond, S. (Ed), *Crossing the Boundary: What Will Women Priests Mean?* London: Mowbray.
- Murray, N., Winfrey W., Chatterji M., Morland S., Dougherty, L. and Okonofua, F. (2006). Factors Related to Induced Abortion among Young Women in Edo State, Nigeria. *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 251-268.
- Musick, J. S. (1993). *Young, Poor, and Pregnant: The Psychology of Teenage Motherhood*. New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press.
- Neiterman, E. (2012). Constructing and Deconstructing Teen Pregnancy as a Social Problem. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 24-27.

- Ngcobo, B. (2009). The Psycho-Social Experiences of Unwed Teenage Mothers in Faith Communities: A Qualitative Study Masters Dissertation University of KwaZulu-Natal. Available at <http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/178/NgcoboThesis2009.pdf?sequence=1> Assessed 21/05/2014.
- Northup, L. A. (1997). *Ritualizing Women: Patterns of Spirituality*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press.
- Obayan, A.O.I. (1995). Changing perspectives in the Extended Family System in Nigeria: Implications for Family Dynamics and Counselling. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 253-257.
- Ojo, M. A. (2011). Sexuality, Marriage and Piety among Charismatics in Nigeria. *Religion* Vol. 27, No. 1, pp.65-79.
- Okereke, C. I. (2010a). Sexually Transmitted Infections among Adolescents in a Rural Nigeria. *Indian Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 32–40.
- Okonofua, F. E., Hammed, A., Nzeribe, E., Saidu, B., Abass, T., Adeboye, G., Adegun, T., and Okolocha, C. (2009). Perceptions of Policy-makers in Nigeria toward Unsafe Abortion and Maternal Mortality. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 194-202.
- Okpani, A.O.U. and Okpani, J. U. (2000). Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use among Female Adolescents- A Report from Port Harcourt Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, Vol. 4, No.1, pp. 40-47.
- Olaitan, O. I. (2011). Attitudes of University Students towards Abortion in Nigeria. *International Journal of Tropical Medicine*, Vol. 6. No. 3, pp. 52-57.
- Olaitan, O.L., Talabi, A.E., Olumorin, C.O., Braimoh, K.T., Kayode, O.O., Onigbinde, A.T. (2012). Risks Experienced during Pregnancy among Teenagers in South West Nigeria. *International Journal of Collaborative Research on Internal Medicine and Public health* Vol. 4, No 1.
- Olukorede, W. E. and Oluwaseun, A. A. (2009). Causes and Consequences of Induced Abortion among University Undergraduates in Nigeria. Available online at: <http://iussp2009.princeton.edu/papers/90906>. Accessed 06-11-2013.
- Onyeocha, A. E. (2014). *The Cry of the African Widow*. Owerri: Opanto Productions.
- Orsi, R. T. (1997a). Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion. In Hall, D. D. (Ed.), *Lived Religion in America Toward a History of Practice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Osakinle, E.O., Babatunde, J.O. and Alade, F.A. (2013). Youths and Their Choice of Contraceptives towards an Effective Reproductive Health: The Case of Ekiti State, Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 9, pp. 193-202.
- Otoide, V. O., Oronsaye, F. and Okonofua, F. E. (2001). Why Nigerian Adolescents Seek Abortion Rather than Contraception: Evidence from Focus Group Discussions. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 77-81.
- Page, S. (2008). The Construction of Masculinities and Femininities in the Church of England: The Case of the Male Clergy Spouse', *Feminist Theology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp 31-42.
- Page, S. (2010). *Femininities and Masculinities in the Church of England: A Study of Priests as Mothers and Male Clergy Spouses*, University of Nottingham: PhD Research Thesis.
- Para-Mallam, O. J. (2007). Faith, Gender and Development Agendas in Nigeria: Conflicts, Challenges and Opportunities. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 409-421.
- Pattman, R. (2005). Boys and Girls should not be too Close: Sexuality, the Identities of African Boys and Girls and HIV/AIDS Education. *Sexualities*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 497-516.
- Phoenix, A. (1991). *Young Mothers?* Oxford: Polity Press.
- Ramazanoglu, C. and Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Raynolds, J., Wetherell, M. and Taylor, S. (2007). *Choice and chance: negotiating agency in narratives of singleness*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Inc.
- Riddick, B. (2000). An Examination of the Relationship between Labelling and Stigmatisation with Special Reference to Dyslexia. *Disability and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 653–667.
- Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage Publications.
- Ritzer, G. (2008). *Sociological Theory*. 7th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rosenau, D. E. (2002). Single and Sexual: The Church's Neglected Dilemma. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp 185-194.
- Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review*. Vol. 35, No.3, pp. 260-271.



- Salako, A. A., Iyaniwura, C. A., Jeminusi, O. A. and Sofowora, R. (2006). Sexual Behaviour, Contraception and Fertility among In-School Adolescents in Ikenne Local Government, South-Western Nigeria. *Journal of Clinical Practice*, Vol. 9, No. 1. pp 26-36.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Scambler, G. (2009). Health-related Stigma. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 441–455.
- Schilt, K. and Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 440-464.
- Sharma, S. (2008). When Young Women Say “yes”: Exploring the Sexual Selves of Young Canadian Women in Protestant Churches. In Aune, K., Sharma, S. and Vincett, G. (Eds.), *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Sharp, G. and Kremer, G. (2006). The Safety Dance: Confronting Harassment, Intimidation and Violence in The Field. *Sociological Methodology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 317-327.
- Silverman, D. (2003). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London: Sage Publications.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Singh, I. (2004). Doing their Jobs: Mothering with Rithalin in a Culture of Mother-blame. *Social Sciences and Medicine*, Vol. 59, No. 6, pp. 1193-1205.
- Smart, B. (2002). *Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, D. J. (2000). “These Girls Today Na War-O”: Premarital Sexuality and Modern Identity in South-Eastern Nigeria. *Africa Today*, Vol. 47, No.3/4, pp. 99-120.
- Smith, D. J. (2010). Youth, Sin and Sex in Nigeria: Christianity and HIV/AIDS-Related Beliefs and Behaviour among Rural-Urban Migrants. *International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care*, Vol.6, No 5, pp. 425-437
- Stronge, P. (2006) ‘In the Name of All that is Holy: Classification and the Sacred’, *Esharp*, Vol. 7. Available at: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_41200\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41200_en.pdf).
- Stuenkel, D. and Wong, V. (2013). Stigma. In Lubkin, I. M. and Larsen, P. D. (Eds.), *Chronic Illness: Impact and Interventions* (pp. 47-74). Sudbury, Mass: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

- Tamale, S. (2000). Point of Order Mr. Speaker: African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 8 – 15.
- Temple, B. and Edwards, R. (2002). Interpreters/Translators and Cross-Language Research: Reflexivity and Border Crossings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol.1, No. 2, pp. 1-22.
- The Holy Bible, (1982). *New King James Version*. Colombia: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- Thompson, D. (2001). *Radical Feminism Today*. London: Sage.
- Thornicroft, G., Rose, D., Kassam, A. and Sartorius, N. (2007). Stigma: Ignorance, Prejudice or Discrimination? *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 190, No. 3, pp. 192-193.
- Tolman, D. L. (2005). *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tyler, I. (2008). “Chav Mum Chav Scum”. *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp 17-34.
- Ulrich, M. and Weatherall, A. (2000). Motherhood and Infertility: Viewing through the Lens of Infertility. *Feminism & Psychology* Vol. 10, No.3, pp. 323-336.
- Unger, J.B., Molina, G.B. and Teran, L. (2000). Perceived Consequences of Teenage Childbearing among Adolescent Girls in an Urban Sample. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Vol. 23, No.3, pp. 205-212.
- Unicef (2008). Young People and Family Planning: Teenage Pregnancy. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/Teenage\\_Pregnancies\\_-\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/Teenage_Pregnancies_-_Overview.pdf). Assessed 10/10/2013.
- Usmanu, M. (1999). *Anaguta Rites of Passage*. Jos: Oden Press.
- Vallanueva, M. I. M. (1997). *The Social Construction of Sexuality: Personal Meanings, Perceptions of Sexual Experience, and Females' Sexuality in Puerto Rico*. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: PhD Research Thesis.
- Villarreal, M. (1998). Adolescent Fertility: Socio-Cultural Issues and Programme Implications. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/sd/wpdirect/WPan0024.htm>.
- Wallbank, J. A. (2001). *Challenging Motherhood(s)*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S. J. (2001). *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

- Whitehead, E. (2001). Teenage Pregnancy: On the Road to Social Death. *International Journal of Nursing Studies* Vol. 38, pp. 337-446.
- Williams, F. (2004). *Rethinking Families* London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Wong, J. and Checkland, D. (1999). *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting: Social and Ethical Issues*. London: University of Toronto Press Incorporation.
- Woog, V., Singh, S., Browne, A. and Philbin, J. (2015). *Adolescent Women's Need for and Use of Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Developing Countries*. New York: Guttmacher Institute.
- World Health Organisation (2004). *Adolescent Pregnancy: issues in Adolescent Health and Development*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- Yardley, E. (2009). Teenage Mothers' Experiences of Formal Support Services. *Journal of Social Policy*. Vol. 38 pp. 241-257.
- Yip, A. K-T. and Page, S-J. (2013). *Religious and Sexual identities: A Multi-faith Exploration of Young Adults*. Farnham (UK): Ashgate.
- Zarifis, I. (2002). Rights and Religious Minorities in Nigeria. *Human Rights Brief*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp 22-25.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Table Showing General Profile of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Relation ship status</b>	<b>No. of Chil dren</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Level of income</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Church attended</b>	<b>Current age</b>	<b>Age at Preg nancy</b>
Jane	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Pentecostal	17	17
Monica	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	23	18
Princess	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	17	16
Grace	Single	1	Secondary	Below N20,000	Public Servant	Anglican	18	16
Stacey	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Anglican	18	18
Sandra	Single	1	Secondary	None	Unemployed	Pentecostal	19	19
Ebere	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	18	17
Rose	Single	1	Primary	None	Unemployed	Pentecostal	18	18
Mary	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Pentecostal	17	17
Onyi	Single	1	Primary	None	Unemployed	Anglican	19	18
Chika	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Pentecostal	18	17
Angela	Single	3	Primary	None	Unemployed	Pentecostal	18	18
Ngozi	Single	1	Tertiary	None	Student	Catholic	19	18
Chisa	Divorced	3	Secondary	Below N20,000	Self Employed	Catholic	26	17
Katie	Single	1	Secondary	None	Unemployed	Pentecostal	19	18
Carol	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	17	16
Brenda	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	19	18
Bella	Married	1	Primary	None	Unemployed	Pentecostal	17	16
Zoe	Single	1	Secondary	None	Student	Catholic	19	19
Agnes	Single	1	Primary	None	Unemployed	Catholic	19	19
Vera	Single	1	Tertiary	None	Student	Anglican	19	19
Andria	Single	1	Tertiary	None	Student	Catholic	19	18

Becky	Single	1	Secondary	Below N20,000	Self Employed	Pentecostal	24	16
Debie	Single	1	Secondary	None	Unemployed	Catholic	18	18
Amaka	Single	2	Secondary	Below N20,000	Student	Anglican	26	17

**Appendix B: Table Showing Profile of Parents of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Mother's Level of Education</b>	<b>Mother's Occupation</b>	<b>Father's Level of Education</b>	<b>Father's Occupation</b>
Jane	Secondary	Business	Any Other	Public Servant
Monica	Primary	Unemployed	Tertiary	Business
Princess	Secondary	Self Employed	Secondary	Self Employed
Grace	Tertiary	Self Employed	Secondary	Self Employed
Stacey	Secondary	Self Employed	Primary	Unemployed
Sandra	Secondary	Self Employed	Tertiary	Self Employed
Ebere	Primary	Self Employed	Secondary	Self Employed
Rose	Secondary	Unemployed	Secondary	Self Employed
Mary	Primary	Self Employed	Secondary	Self Employed
Onyi	None Formal	Unemployed	None Formal	Self Employed
Chika	None Formal	Self Employed	Primary	Self Employed
Angela	None Formal	Unemployed	None Formal	Self Employed
Ngozi	Tertiary	Public Servant	Tertiary	Public Servant
Chisa	Secondary	Unemployed	Tertiary	Public Servant
Katie	Secondary	Unemployed	Secondary	Unemployed
Carol	Tertiary	Public Servant	Secondary	Self Employed
Brenda	Secondary	Self Employed	None Formal	Unemployed
Bella	Primary	Self Employed	Secondary	Self Employed
Zoe	Secondary	Self Employed	Secondary	Public Servant

Agnes	None Formal	Unemployed	Primary	Unemployed
Vera	Primary	Self Employed	Primary	Self Employed
Andria	Tertiary	Public Servant	Tertiary	Self Employed
Becky	Tertiary	Public Servant	Tertiary	Public Servant
Debie	None Formal	Unemployed	Primary	Unemployed
Amaka	Primary	Self Employed	Primary	Self Employed

#### Appendix C: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers' Interviews Conducted

Unmarried Mothers	Number of Interviewee	Age range at time of interview
Became Mothers within last 12 Months	21	13-19 years
Became Mothers within last 10 Years	4	20-29 years
<b>Total</b>	25	

#### Appendix C.1: Table Showing Relationship Status

Category	Single	Married
<b>Number of Participants</b>	24	1

#### Appendix C.2: Table Showing Number of Children

Category	1 Child	2 Children	3 and above
<b>Number of Participants</b>	22	1	2

**Appendix C.3: Table Showing Level of Education**

<b>Category</b>	No Education	Primary School	Secondary	Tertiary	Any Other
<b>Number of Participants</b>	0	4	18	3	0

**Appendix C.4: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers Occupation**

<b>Category</b>	Unemployed	Student	Public Servant	Self Employed
<b>Number of Participants</b>	8	14	1	2

**Appendix C.5: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers Level of Income**

<b>Category</b>	No Income	Below N20,000	N21,000 – N40,000	N41,000 – N60,000	N61,000 & above
<b>Number of Participants</b>	21	4	0	0	0

**Appendix C.6: Table Showing Unmarried Mothers Church Membership**

<b>Category</b>	Catholic	Anglican	Pentecostal
<b>Number of Participants</b>	11	5	9

**Appendix C.7: Table Showing Level of Education of Mothers of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Category</b>	No Education	Primary School	Secondary	Tertiary	Any Other
<b>Number of Participants</b>	5	5	9	6	

**Appendix C.8: Table Showing Occupation of Mothers of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Category</b>	Unemployed	Student	Public Servant	Self Employed
<b>Number of Participants</b>	8	0	5	12

**Appendix C.9: Table Showing Level of Education of Fathers of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Category</b>	No Education	Primary School	Secondary	Tertiary	Any Other
<b>Number of Participants</b>	3	6	8	7	1

**Appendix C.10: Table Showing Occupation of Fathers of Unmarried Mothers**

<b>Category</b>	Unemployed	Student	Public Servant	Self Employed
<b>Number of Participants</b>	5		4	16

**Appendix C.11: Table Showing Church/Community Members one-to-one Interviews Conducted**

<b>Church Membership of Participant</b>	<b>Number of Members Interviewed</b>
Catholic	8
Pentecostal	6
Anglican	4
Total	18



**Appendix D: Table Showing Church/Community Members Focus Group Interviews Conducted**

<b>Church Membership</b>	<b>Number of Focus Group Participants</b>
Catholic Church	5
Anglican Church	4
Pentecostal Church 1	5
Pentecostal Church 2	4
Grand Total	18

## Appendix E: Participants' Information Sheet



### Research Participants Information Sheet

#### Research Title:

Unmarried Young Mothers in South Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences

#### Aims of the research?

- ✓ To explore experiences of young unmarried mothers and prevailing attitudes towards unmarried teenage pregnancy.
- ✓ To investigate whether family and church-based stigmatisation exists and if so, its effects on young unmarried mothers.
- ✓ To examine unmarried young mothers' knowledge, access and use of contraceptives and abortion practice.
- ✓ To explore support services currently available to young unmarried mothers.

#### Invitation Paragraph

You are being asked to take part in a research entitled '*Unmarried Young Mothers in South Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences*'. This research has been approved and will be carried out by George Okechukwu Amakor, student at Aston University; Birmingham United Kingdom. The research will be supervised by the university lecturers Dr Sarah Jane-Page and Dr Pam Lowe.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to express your views about teenage pregnancy, either as someone who has experienced unmarried teenage pregnancy personally or as a family member, church member,

community member or other form of social entity member that has witnessed unmarried teenage pregnancy happening to someone else.

### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

Your participation is voluntary. We would like you to consent to participate in this study as we believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. If you do not wish to participate you do not have to do anything in response to this request. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

If the participant desires, the researcher will allow the individual to be accompanied by one person of their choice with whom they might feel comfortable with during the interview. A female assistant can also be provided to accompany the researcher in case potential participants would prefer to have someone of their same gender present during the interview.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

If you are happy to participate in the research we will ask you to read this information sheet, sign the consent form and return it to us. When this is received, you will be contacted to discuss your participation and arrangements will be made for you to meet the researcher for an interview.

Information from the interviews will be recorded and all efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality. In cases where there is need, the researcher will provide interviewees with help lines and other contact details of relevant government and nongovernmental organisations that can be of help.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no known risks for you in this study. You may be asked to answer questions on unmarried teenage pregnancy, however; all necessary steps will be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Personal details relating to you or where you are from will not be recorded anywhere and only the lead researcher will have access to the full transcripts.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

This research might provide individuals the opportunity to share their views and experiences. It is difficult to suggest that there will be any immediate benefits of this research. I sincerely hope that this study will lead to an increased awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding unmarried teenage mothers; and that this awareness can effect potential beneficial changes in the future.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information you provide to us will be kept confidential. Only members of the research team will have access to it. All data collection, storage and processing will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act in the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The information gathered through this research is intended for a doctoral study and will be used for research papers and reports. We will take steps to ensure that participants cannot be identified in any publication.

**Contacts for further information, advice or counselling**

## Appendix F: Participants' Consent Form



### Consent Form

Research Title: **Unmarried Young Mothers in South Eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and Experiences**

Researcher: **George Amakor, Department of Languages and Social Science, Aston University**



#### FOR THE PARTICIPANT

This consent form establishes that you have read and understood what taking part in this research study will involve. Please read and sign below.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I understand that I can ask for further instructions or explanations at any time. I understand that taking part is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. I am aware that any information that might potentially identify me will not be used in published material. I understand that information about me recorded during the study will be kept in a secure database. I agree to participate in this study as outlined to me.

#### Participant

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Researcher

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Church/Community Members Interview Guide

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

*Introduction: Who I am; my research; things to be covered in the interview; ethics; interview plan etc.*

<b>1: Church Membership and Background</b>	
<b>2: Early Age of Sexual Activity</b>  - Why is this	<b>7: Position of Churches on Unmarried Pregnancy</b>  - Would you be worried about other teenagers if you had a teenage unmarried mother in your church?  - What should the church do when an unmarried teenager gets pregnant?  - Example(s) of unmarried teenage pregnancy in your church  - How did the leaders (pastors or priests react)?  - How did other members react?
<b>3: Sexual education to young unmarried women</b>  - Views on what age sexual education should be given	<b>8: Stigmatisation of unmarried teenage mothers</b>  - To what extent are unmarried teenage mothers stigmatised?  - Views on the reasons for this stigmatisation  - Those usually behind this  - The impact on the mother
<b>4: Teaching and allowing young unmarried women to use contraceptives</b>  - Your opinion on pregnancy prevention  - What method(s) of prevention should be used  - What method(s) should not be used and why	<b>9: Stigmatisation of Children of Unmarried Teenage Mothers</b>  - Extent of this stigmatisation  - The reason for it  - Those behind it  - The impact on the child
<b>5: Early Unmarried Pregnancy and Motherhood</b>  - Your preferred option(s) for a pregnant unmarried teenager  - Whose responsibility is teenage	<b>10: Healthcare Access for Unmarried Pregnant Teenagers</b>  - Describe it  - Positives

<p>pregnancy (woman, man or both)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cases where men have married or financially supported the unmarried teenager they impregnated</li> <li>- Views on holding men more accountable for impregnating unmarried teenagers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negatives</li> <li>- Your suggestions</li> </ul>
<p><b>6: General Family Reaction towards Unmarried Pregnant Teenager</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples in your community</li> <li>- Family reaction in this case</li> <li>- Why such reaction</li> <li>- Community reaction towards the young unmarried mother and her child</li> <li>- Why such reaction</li> </ul>	<p><b>11: Financial and Moral Support For Mother and Child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who from</li> <li>- Describe it</li> <li>- Your suggestions</li> </ul>
	<p><b>12: Any Other Significant Issues Not Covered</b></p>

## Appendix H: Unmarried Mothers Interview Guide

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUNG UNMARRIED MOTHERS

*Introduction: Who I am; my research; things to be covered in the interview; ethics; interview plan etc.*

<p><b>1: Growing up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who with?</li> <li>- Family views on religion (e.g. institution and involvement)</li> <li>- Your Church membership and level of involvement</li> <li>- What about school?</li> <li>- What were your future plans?</li> </ul>	<p><b>7: Knowledge of the risk of pregnancy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What you knew about preventing pregnancy</li> <li>- Your level of sexual education if any</li> <li>- The source of your sexual education</li> <li>- How useful was it?</li> <li>- Growing up, your access and usage of pregnancy prevention methods (contraceptives)</li> <li>- How easy or difficult to obtain?</li> <li>- As at the time of your pregnancy were you using contraceptives?</li> <li>- If yes, what type were you using?</li> <li>- What other types you were aware of?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2: Pregnancy Journey</b></p>	<p><b>8: Relations with Men Growing up</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did you find out?</li> <li>- How did you feel?</li> <li>- Who did you tell?</li> <li>- How did the person react?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The extent of pressure towards first sexual encounter</li> <li>- Factors considered in forming relations with men (e.g. money, gifts)</li> <li>- Support of the father of your child, during and after pregnancy</li> </ul>
<b>3: Family Reaction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What did your family suggest?</li> <li>- What restrictions did you face?</li> </ul>	<b>9: Healthcare Support Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who from? (Hospital, Antenatal clinic, NGO, Maternity Home, Church)</li> <li>- At what stage of your pregnancy?</li> <li>- What was particularly good?</li> </ul>
<b>4: Church Awareness of Pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did church leaders react?</li> <li>- What restrictions did you face?</li> <li>- What was general reaction of members?</li> <li>- How did you feel about it?</li> </ul>	<b>10: Being a Mother</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acceptance of you and your child in your family</li> <li>- Acceptance of you and your child in your church</li> <li>- Acceptance of you and your child in your community</li> <li>- The importance of these in raising your child</li> </ul>
<b>5: School awareness of pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What was staffs reaction?</li> <li>- What restrictions did you face?</li> <li>- How did fellow students react?</li> <li>- Your feelings toward the reactions</li> </ul>	<b>11: Support and Economic help as a Mom</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who from</li> <li>- The level of support and economic help received</li> <li>- What can be done better?</li> </ul>
<b>6: Friends and Neighbours reaction</b> <p>How did you feel about it?</p>	<b>12: Any Other Significant Issues Not Covered</b>



## **Appendix I: Church/ Community Members Biographic data sheet**

### **Participants Biographic Details**

Instructions: Please fill in the most appropriate answer; or tick (✓) where options are provided.

1. What is your age group?
  - a. 20 – 30
  - b. 31 – 40
  - c. 41 – 50
  - d. 51 – 60
  - e. 61 – 70
  - f. Above 70
  
2. Level of Education
  - a. No formal education
  - b. Primary School
  - c. Secondary School
  - d. Tertiary Education
  - e. Any other? Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How often do you attend church?
  - a. Once a week
  - b. More than once a week
  - c. Once a month
  - d. 2 – 3 times per month
  - e. Only on special occasions
  - f. Never
  
5. What role do you play in Church? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J: Unmarried Mothers' Biographic Data Sheet

### Participants Biographic Details

Instructions: Please fill in the most appropriate answer; or tick (✓) where options are provided.

Current Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship Status \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of Children \_\_\_\_\_  
Age at pregnancy \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your Level of education
  - a. No formal education
  - b. Primary School
  - c. Secondary School
  - d. Tertiary Education
  - e. Any other? Specify
7. What is your mother's level of education
  - a. No formal education
  - b. Primary School
  - c. Secondary School
  - d. Tertiary Education
  - e. Any other? Specify
8. What is your father's level of education
  - a. No formal education
  - b. Primary School
  - c. Secondary School
  - d. Tertiary Education
  - e. Any other? Specific
9. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is your mother's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your father's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your level of income per month?
  - a. No Income
  - b. Below 20,000
  - c. 21,000- 40,000
  - d. 41,000- 60,000
  - e. 61,000 and above